

Date: 21st August 2011

Sermon: Rev Dr André Groenewald

Reading: Luke 9: 18 – 27

Background to the reading

It is commonly assumed that Luke wrote his Gospel in such a way that it included all the marginalized of their society such as women, children, the Gentiles, the despised like the Samaritans.

In our reading it is no exception. Luke tells this story in a totally different way than that of Matthew and Mark. In Luke this story follows the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand emphasizing Jesus' power and in a sense tied these two events together. But we must also see this story in Luke as a follow up of prior events. In Luke 9 verses 7-9 Herod the son of Herod heard of all the things Jesus did and asked the question: who is this man?

Then Jesus performed a big miracle by feeding 5,000 people with five loaves and two fishes. There was even left overs!

Now immediately after this miracle Jesus went to somewhere where He was private and alone with his disciples, praying. In Luke Jesus always prays before a significant event. Luke does not tell us where this took place emphasizing the fact that it does not really matter. What really matters is the turning point in Jesus' ministry when Peter confesses Him as the "Christ" the Anointed One of God.

The disciples answered Jesus that the people think of Him as one of the Prophets in the Old Testament. This was strange because many Palestinian Jews believed that prophets in the Old Testament sense had ceased.

Then Jesus asks them who do they think He is. Peter then confesses him as the Messiah. There were many different views of the Messiah (or messiahs) in Jesus' time, but they all revolved around a deliverance on earth and an earthly kingdom. The rendering of a Hebrew term Messiah meaning "anointed one," equivalent to the original sense of the Greek term translated "Christ." In the Old Testament, different kinds of people were anointed, and some of the Dead Sea Scrolls mention two main anointed ones in the end time, a king and a priest. But the common expectation reflected in the biblical Psalms and Prophets was that one of David's royal descendants would take the throne again when God re-established his kingdom for Israel. Most people believed that God would somehow have to intervene to put down Roman rule so the Messiah's kingdom could be secure; many seem to have thought this intervention would be accomplished through force of arms. Various messianic figures arose in first-century Palestine, expecting a miraculous intervention from God; all were crushed by the Romans. (Jesus was the only one claimed to have been resurrected; he was also one of the only messiahs claiming Davidic descent, proof of which became difficult for any claimants arising after a.d. 70.)

But Jesus quickly rids them of their misconceptions. He is the Christ that will suffer and endure hardship so that those who believe in Him can be saved. And because it would be so dangerous for everyone, Jesus asks them not to tell anyone that He is the Christ. It would most certainly lead to a revolution.

The New Testament writers took some Old Testament texts as referring to the Messiah's suffering, but most Jewish people in the first century did not recognize these texts as referring to the Messiah, who was to reign as king. Most Jewish people believed in the resurrection of all the righteous dead at the end of the age and the inauguration of a kingdom under God's appointed ruler afterward. Jesus' resurrection was rooted in a Jewish hope, which in turn was rooted in notions of God's covenant, promise and justice from early in Israel's history. Most Palestinian Jews believed that God would resurrect the bodies of the dead (at least the righteous, and many believed also the wicked), at the end of the age (Daniel 12:2). There was, however, never any thought that one person would rise ahead of everyone else; thus Jesus' resurrection, as an inauguration of the future kingdom within history, caught even the disciples by surprise.

And then Jesus spells out the consequences of believing in Him. They must take up their cross and follow him daily every day. The cross was an instrument of violent and painful execution. To "take the cross" was to carry the horizontal beam (the *patibulum*) of the cross out to the site of execution, usually past a mocking mob. In rhetorically strong terms, Jesus describes what all true disciples must be ready for: if they follow him, they must be ready to face literal scorn on the road to eventual martyrdom, for they must follow to the cross. From the moment of faith believers must count their lives forfeit for the kingdom.

The title "Son of Man" here may refer to Daniel 7:13–14. The kingdom for which the disciples are hoping will ultimately come; but it will be preceded by a period of great suffering and wickedness. Many others in Jesus' day taught that great suffering and sin would precede the kingdom; but Peter and his colleagues preferred the easier view that the kingdom would come without suffering (perhaps, as some believed, by a supernatural, costless triumph).

The future glory of the preceding verses is anticipated by way of a revelation of the glory they would experience in 9:32–35. Because the future Messiah had already come, the glory of his future kingdom is also already present.

The meaning: To believe in Jesus Christ means a lifelong commitment of service, sacrifice and love.

Amen

Sermon

²³ *Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."*

In this passage we are told that faith in the Lord Jesus means a lot more than just to admit that Jesus is the Christ. It involves a lifelong commitment of sacrifice and self-denial. It means that we will have to hold on to our faith no matter what the consequences will be. It will mean that we know whom we are serving. If we serve and follow Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour then we will have to show it through our deeds, our commitment and even through our suffering!

We must think of our faith as keys to open the door to God. Keys are precious in our society. And sometimes we lose our way just like we lose our keys.

Yesterday I bought a key finder key-ring. For those of you who do not know what its function is - well when you whistle, it makes a noise so that you can easily find your lost keys! I do not know if it is going to work but I will try anything because it really gets me that I always have to look for my keys.

I even bought one for my mum because I think she is worse than me for losing keys and I mean any keys. I will tell you what happened this holiday. We were visiting her and she wanted me to test drive her new, second hand automatic 4x4. I managed to drive out of the garage but when I tried to fasten the baby seats one of the seat belts was not compatible. So I had to drive it back into the garage. I passed the keys to my mother who gave them to Nanda to put in Nehan's baby bag. And we totally forgot about them. So, Nanda and I were at the South coast about 60 miles from my mother when she phoned and asked if we had seen the car keys. She wanted to drive the car but could not find the keys. And she kept looking and phoning us. I WAS searching everywhere except in the Nehan's bag. On the Monday I tried to remember when and where I saw the keys for the last time and then I remembered that we went to a local zoo and all we had was the bag. I jumped up and discovered the keys. We all were over the moon when we found the keys.

And I know we are just talking about something as simple as keys – without them we are lost! We cannot open and go into our houses/offices/classrooms, we cannot drive anywhere, we cannot open closets. Without keys we are indeed lost!

And without faith we are lost too. Without faith in the Lord Jesus nothing on this earth matters. Without having a living relationship with our Lord and Saviour all our relationships on earth are doomed. Without our hope in the Everlasting Kingdom every situation and every relationship and every opportunity is hopeless. Without our trust in God's Holy Spirit we cannot survive one single second in this world.

We need faith to carry us through our lives. We need faith in Jesus to help us when the going gets tough. We need His presence when we are falling fast. We need His loving hand to pick us up after every broken relationship, after each hurting event, after each disappointment, after each failure!

We need God to be with us. And unlike keys that can sometimes be lost forever, our faith does not have to be like that. All we need is to close our eyes and speak to the Lord. We do not need to whistle for Him to be identified. We know exactly who He is. He is there whenever we call His Almighty name. We do not need to look for Him. He is there right in the middle of each troubling and challenging situation we have to deal with. And if we do not want to be silent, we can just pick up His Holy Word and read from it.

But when we do have faith in our Lord and Saviour, we need to know that life would not be necessarily easy. Just like we have to pass a driver's test to turn the key inside the car for it to run, and have responsibilities as drivers, so too we have responsibilities as followers of Jesus. And in many ways our faith is a journey with our Lord Jesus Christ. There will be times that life is good – full of joy. There will be times where we just want to stop and end the journey. There will be accidents where we will get hurt. There will be tempting situations that will distract us from our journey with the Lord. There will be many “turn offs” or choices, many sacrifices, and many long steep hills. But when we journey with the Lord He will help us carry the burdens. He will soften the blows of other people that want to hurt us. He will be there whenever we call out His name and confess Him as our only Lord and Saviour.

All we need to do is to say yes to a lifelong relationship where He is in charge and leading us on to His eternal Kingdom. May we go out of this building and proclaim His Holy Name wherever we are! And may God help us that our confession of Him is not only one of mouth but accompanied by deeds!

Amen