

SERMON: Sunday – 26 June 2022 – Rev Alistair Cowper

How we all make excuses

Luke 9:57-62

I want to look simply at the three reasons given in today's reading, three excuses really, for not following Jesus.

First things first. Jesus invites everyone to follow him. Everyone. Young and old, rich and poor, girl or boy

No one is not invited and that will never change. The invitation never expires. It's always now.

That said, not everyone decides to follow Jesus. So let's look at the first reason.

(SLIDE)

57 As they were going along the road, someone said to Jesus, "I will follow you wherever you go." 58 And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."

I think Jesus knew that the man who said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go" couldn't be certain of that. He probably hadn't given it a lot of thought. How could he possibly know that he'd follow Jesus anywhere. It would depend where Jesus went. So, if he went somewhere nice then the man would say, "oh this is nice, we must do this again sometime; this is great, I'm glad we did this, it's great we came here".

But what if Jesus went somewhere not so nice; somewhere the man didn't expect Jesus to go? What if following Jesus anywhere meant mixing with the wrong crowd, making friends with enemies, forgiving those who'd hurt him etc etc etc. And in the end to be 'homelessly' poor and have to rely on the kindness of strangers.

Maybe that kind of lifestyle would not be what the man imagined when he signed up with a "I'll follow you wherever". Maybe he imagined something better, more glamorous, a bit more comfortable at least.

Was he willing to forsake it all, to live in such a way that this world would not be his home and so not hoard possessions or build earthly empires but instead to do as Jesus taught, to store up for himself, treasures in heaven?

Was he willing to follow Jesus on the road to rejection not popularity; homelessness not opulence; faith and trust not in God's providing rather than self survival?

Was he prepared to count the cost of following Jesus and do it anyway? Are we?

Let's look at the second man. I'm sorry all three appear to be men. Did the woman not have these sort of questions? Did they just follow Jesus anyway, without question? I suspect they did.

(SLIDE)

59 To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." 60 And Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

Now this is a tough one. Who wouldn't do the honourable thing and take care of a family funeral. I don't think Jesus is saying one shouldn't do these things. In fact there are plenty other Scriptures calling for such loyal devotion to family especially to parents.

But I suppose that anything can become an excuse to avoid the hard road that Jesus trod. Let the dead bury the dead might simply mean that the kingdom that Jesus spoke about and lived out was all about life not death. At its core is the message of resurrection from the dead, new life from old. And its important that the message of Jesus contains that hope beyond death, that trust in the everlasting God and in the gift of eternal life.

And so to the third man.

(SLIDE)

61 Another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." 62 And Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Again, this is not about ignoring loyalty to family or friends and neighbours back home. Its not a call to leave everyone behind. But it is a call to keep looking ahead because if the man doesn't do that he's going to plough a crooked furrow.

I've never had the opportunity to steer a plough behind a horse when ploughing a field but I'd love to try it. But I know from similar things, like sawing a piece of wood for example, that if you keep looking back where you've already cut a not pay attention to what you've still to do, then you're not going to get a good result.

That's what this is about. Its about leaving what been done and pressing on to what's ahead, still to come, yet to be achieved, the new daily opportunities that following Jesus presents; to keep ploughing on; a long obedience in the One direction, as Eugene Peterson puts it.

Yes the man is making an excuse which seems very plausible, to say farewell to those at home, and he may have been making that excuse for all sorts of reasons that we will never know. But the fact that the man says to Jesus I WILL follow you but first ... suggests he's not fully committed to the idea of going with Jesus. There are other things more important to him. He's made a start but he's got to the point where he's not sure he wants to go any further.

Following Jesus is a daily, life long commitment which begins afresh every moment, every breath indeed, that says yes I'm here and I will follow. No excuses. Here I am Lord, use me and send me.