

Worshipping God Together

Call to worship

Minister: Lord, you alone are my portion and my cup;
you make my lot secure.

**All: The boundary lines have fallen for me in
pleasant places; surely I have a delightful
inheritance.**

MP 590 Seek ye first the kingdom of God

Opening prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Lord God, we worship you freely today.

We rejoice that you are a divine Father
who treats us not as subjects or slaves,
but as beloved and precious children.

We praise you for Jesus Christ,
who, by allowing himself to be taken captive
and pinned to the cross, ensured freedom from sin and death.

We thank you for your Holy Spirit,
who releases us from the petty demands of law,
and leads us in the path of abundant life.

We ask this in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray:

ALL: Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; And
forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for
ever. Amen.

Reflecting on God's Word

Reading: Luke 9:51-62 (NT pages 1040-1041)

Reader: Carol Coull

MP 515

O love that wilt not let me go

Sermon

In Verse one literally says: Jesus “stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem” “Setting one’s face” normally implied resolute determination, such as a prophet would display. Jesus’ approach meant that He was going to fulfilled what He was initially called to do.

Galilean pilgrims to the Passover feast in Jerusalem often took the short route through Samaria, although some took a longer route around it. But this verse suggests that Jesus sought accommodations there, which would have offended many pious Pharisees and most Jewish nationalists.

The Samaritans were people of mixed Jewish and Gentile ancestry who claimed descent from Jacob and worshiped the God of Israel, but felt that Mount Gerizim rather than Jerusalem was the holy site for worship. Samaritans and Jews had detested one another’s holy sites. They engaged the Jews in bitter rivalry, often leading to political hostilities in Jesus’ day, sometimes requiring Roman intervention.

No wonder James and John want to call down fire from heaven as Elijah had done on the altar on Mount Carmel and when two companies of troops came against him (1 Kings 18:38; 2 Kings 1:10, 12). Elijah did this under much severer circumstances than Jesus faces here; all three cases were life-threatening. Jesus rebukes them for being so anti Samaritan!

Ancient Jewish readers would probably view Jesus' merciful restraint as pious (1 Sam 11:13; 2 Sam 19:22), no matter how much they hated the Samaritans.

Jesus then displays the true character of discipleship in quite radical terms.

Many Palestinian Jews were poor, but few were homeless; Jesus had given up even home to travel and is completely dependent on the hospitality and support of others. To be a disciple will mean sacrifice.

It was your duty as a son to bury your father. No excuses were accepted and failure to do so would have been seen a shameful to the honour of your family name. The initial burial took place shortly after a person's decease, and would have already occurred by the time this man would be speaking with Jesus. But a year after the first burial, after the flesh had rotted off the bones, the son would return to rebury the bones in a special box in a slot in the tomb wall. Thus the son here could be asking for as much as a year's delay.

One of an eldest son's most important responsibilities was his father's burial. Jesus' demand that the son place Jesus above this responsibility would thus sound like heresy: in Jewish tradition, honoring father and mother was one of the greatest commandments, and to follow Jesus in such a radical way would seem to break this commandment.

Family were everything. If you went away without greeting them properly would have been shameful too. Even the prophet Elijah found Elisha plowing, he called him to follow but allowed him first to bid farewell to his family Jesus' call here is more radical than that of a radical prophet.

But Jesus is making the point that a disciple cannot look back over his shoulders just like someone who wants to plough straight furrows, cannae afford to do so. A disciple will look into the future and see the coming kingdom of God. The hand-held plow was light and wooden and often had an iron point.

Jesus emphasized the cost of discipleship, and outlined the sacrifice of following him. It is almost as if Jesus is discouraging all those who wants to follow Him. But in retrospect, He is not. He wants them to follow Him after thinking carefully what it means to follow Him. They must count the cost of following Him so that ONCE they do follow Him, they will never turn back. And the cost is non-negotiable and they must be prepared for it.

It is just like shopping. The price of a product is the price and if you do not have the right amount of money – you cannae buy the product. Last Thursday at ASDA I

was so embarrassed. I wanted to PAY WITH my credit card but I forgot my pin. So I had such a hassle since Thursday before I go on holiday just to retrieve my pin again. And in a way I did not realize the COST of losing your pin! If I had known the implications I would have thought more carefully to get the pin right!

Jesus says to the first man that there is a big difference between commitment and involvement. If he wants to follow Jesus he must be committed fully to even sacrifice his most basic need namely to sleep in a place of shelter against the elements. I guess this is a time message for all of us. We can be very involved in church activities without being committed to following Jesus. We can start worshipping the church where actually we need to worship the God of the church. It is like the chicken and pig who saw a sign outside a church saying “we must help the poor. Free Breakfast – bacon and eggs”. The hen said to the pig wow is that not amazing. The pig answered NO it is not! To you it is only involvement, to me it is total sacrifice! Being involved means that you can do what you want, as you want and when you feel like doing it. Commitment means that you are at the call of Jesus 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

Are we really committed to Jesus or are we just involved?

The second man who wanted to follow Jesus did not think about his priorities. He did not think that following Jesus will have first priority. He did not think that following Jesus will mean radical changes in his life. We also can get our priorities

wrong especially when it comes to earthly commitments. I find it shocking that it is sometimes easier to cancel church activities than to cancel an opera concert! Commitment to following Jesus must take precedent over all other earthly commitments. Why? Because Jesus is the ONLY TRUTH, the Life and the WAY to the eternal kingdom of God. Jesus came and saved all those who believe in Him from sin, death and hell. He made a new future possible. But if we say we belong to him, we need to show it through our commitment – yes we must get our hands dirty in the work of outreach. There is a lost and dying world out there that needs the hope that we have in Christ.

The last man who wanted to follow Jesus lacked dedicated focus. He did not think to follow Jesus is such a big deal. I mean he just wanted to go and say farewell to his family. A great problem in the church today is that we have misplaced our focus. We focus on programs and procedures instead of focusing on ministry and people. If we fail to reach people, we are not failing the church or the denomination; we are failing Christ Himself. We fail daily to obey Jesus' last commission namely to go out and make people His disciples.

So let us be honest this morning. There will be always enough reasons not to follow Jesus. There will be enough excuses not to listen to His voice. But we need to remember and stay focussed: Jesus' message of the kingdom of God is more important than anything else—even family members. The message of Jesus' salvation cannot wait. Jesus' followers cannot not have divided interests, like a

farmer who begins ploughing and looks back. Someone that often looks back while journeying through life, lacks focus, dedication and direction.

Apparently Luciano Pavarotti tells the story about how he made the choice to be a singer. At a young age his father introduced him to singing and he took to it with great skill and enthusiasm. At one time in Pavarotti's life he was enrolled in both vocal lessons from a professional tenor and college studies to be a teacher. When he graduated from school he faced a dilemma to either become a singer or to become a teacher. When he asked his father about which course to take, his father responded: "If you try to sit on two chairs, you will fall between them. For life, you must choose one chair." Commitment is that's the key. Choose one chair.

Jesus also calls us to commit ourselves to Him in discipleship. Discipleship means putting your hand to the plough and daily doing the ordinary, hard work of ministry. I love it when Irene Nichol says: "it is hard to be a Christian these days, Mr Minister". To sit on the chair of fellowship with Christ, will mean a life of dedication, direction, sacrifice but a life worth living. Because it will be a life full of the hope to press on despite all the tribulations and hardship that we know is part of life.

And yes for the chair, despite being so uncomfortable to sit on will be big enough for **all** to sit on. This chair will give protection to those who are tired and need a rest. This chair will have no arms to lean on because those who follow Jesus will have Jesus to lean upon. This chair will have no legs because those who follow Jesus will have Him as their ONLY foundation.

So if you are still deciding on which chair to sit on, the comfy chair of compliance or the chair of sacrifice, remember that one chair will land in the skip while the other will remain forever in the kingdom of God!

Amen

Responding to God's word

Our offerings are given for the ministry and mission of the church while we sing **MP 582: "Rock of ages"**.

Prayer of thanksgiving: Janice Anderson

MP 469 My faith looks up to Thee

Benediction Receive the blessing of God and go in peace:

Lord, you have called your disciples

to show the world how humanity was created to live.

Now send us out, filled with your Spirit of freedom,

to be agents of liberation and life.

In the name of Christ, whose desire is always

to set people free and make them whole.

And the blessing of God almighty,

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

Be with you all

Now and for evermore **Sung Amen**

