

FOLLOW ME
Sermon for the 3rd Sunday after Pentecost, 2022
Luke 9:51-62

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel from before, Luke 9:51-62: **As the time was coming nearer for Jesus to be taken up, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem.** ⁵² **He sent messengers ahead of Him. They went and entered a village of the Samaritans to get things ready for Him.** ⁵³ **However, the people did not welcome Him, because He was journeying with His face toward Jerusalem.** ⁵⁴ **When His disciples James and John saw this, they asked, “Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and destroy them?”**

⁵⁵ **However, Jesus turned and rebuked them.** ⁵⁶ **Then Jesus and His disciples went on to another village.**

⁵⁷ **While they were walking along the road, someone told Jesus, “I shall follow You wherever You go.”**

⁵⁸ **However, Jesus told him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head.”**

⁵⁹ **He told another man, “Follow Me!”**

However, he said, “Lord, first permit me to go back and bury my father!”

⁶⁰ **Jesus told him, “Let the dead bury their own dead! Rather, you go and proclaim the kingdom of God!”**

⁶¹ **Another man also said, “I shall follow You, Lord, but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home!”**

⁶² **Jesus replied, “No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

“*Follow Me. Come, be My disciples,*” says Jesus, and without hesitation, we respond with “*Yes, Jesus, I shall follow You.*” But do we know what we’re getting ourselves into? What will following Jesus involve? Shouldn’t we know before we answer too fast, “*Yes, Lord?*” From Luke’s Gospel, we hear what it will involve in following Jesus. And if the truth is known, following Him means we are following Him to the cross.

That’s where Jesus Himself is going. Luke writes, “**As the time was coming nearer for Jesus to be taken up, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem.**” Now just on the surface, that sentence doesn’t sound too “crossy,” but when we know the context, it most certainly is.

So let us first look at this part about Jesus being “**taken up.**”

“**Taken up**” is speaking of Jesus’ return journey back to the Father. The Son of God has come from the Father, being sent on a mission. He has come down from heaven for our salvation, taking on human flesh, and now He, Jesus, will be returning to the Father. But where will that journey take Him?

Luke says, “**He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem.**” Now again, on the surface, that doesn’t necessarily sound like it will involve a cross. In fact, it would be easy for His disciples to think just the opposite. After all, Jesus has shown Himself to be the Messiah, the long-promised Deliverer, who will restore Israel to its former glory and even take it to new heights of glory. That’s the *common expectation* of what the Messiah will do. So for Jesus to go to Jerusalem was for them perfect! After all, that’s where it would be expected for the Messiah to go - to Jerusalem, to take up His throne there, and to rule in greatness, grandeur, and glory. So the disciples would gladly follow Jesus there, and while there, maybe they could take up positions in His administration, one on His right, one on His left. That sounds wonderful! Cushy jobs, nice income, power, authority, all the perks. How good is that!

Well, maybe not so fast. Jesus has been talking lately about what’s going to happen. Still, it doesn’t sound too much like what those disciples would expect for the Messiah. For example, He had said about Himself: “*The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised*” (Luke 9:22). Maybe they did not know what this “being raised” business means but being rejected and killed doesn’t sound very good at all! Then another time He had said, “Let these words sink into your ears: “*The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men*” (Matthew 17:22). The disciples don’t understand what this means, either, but it doesn’t sound good. In fact, it sounds rather ominous.

Nevertheless, Jesus “**steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem.**” That’s where all this bad stuff will go down. Jesus knows it, and yet He sets His face to go there. To “set one’s face” speaks of determination. And indeed, our Saviour was absolutely determined to go there. Nothing would stop Him. It’s the mission His Father had sent Him on, and it was necessary for Him to go there to accomplish it. There is no other way other than *the way of the cross.*

So, if any are to follow Jesus, then it will be to **His cross.** And that’s a good thing! It comes with the territory of being one of His disciples. While on the surface, it looks like just the opposite, it’s the best thing that could happen. Because only by going to Jerusalem, only by going to the cross, could Jesus achieve our salvation - and the salvation of the whole world. “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but have eternal life*” (John 3:16). Jesus “**steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem.**” That steadfastness - that determination, means our deliverance. That is how we have been delivered from the burden of all sin and guilt, by Jesus taking it up for us and carrying it to the cross.

If this were not so, then we would be sunk, toast, doomed - however you want to put it. Our sins would condemn us to everlasting damnation, for you and I have broken God’s commandments. We have not loved God as we should. We have not loved our neighbour as

we ought. That's sin, and it comes with consequences. The Law condemns us. Our just punishment would be death under God's judgment, condemned to hell for eternity.

But Jesus goes to the cross. Jesus goes to Jerusalem; He sets His face to go and suffer there for our salvation. He is determined. *Nothing* is going to stop Him. With the Psalmist, we call out, "*Give thanks to the LORD! For He is good. For His mercy endures for ever!*" (Psalm 118:1). Give thanks to the Lord for all time because *He did not stop.* For by His going to Jerusalem, Jesus accomplishes everything we need: ***Forgiveness for our sins.*** We can stand before our heavenly Father fully cleansed and righteous because of His Son, our Saviour Jesus. We have been reconciled to God. "*Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession... Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need*" (Hebrews 4:14, 16). Jesus has reconciled us back to God the Father.

And not only so, when Jesus goes to Jerusalem and suffers death for us, there's even more in store: *Resurrection.* That's what that "*and on the third day be raised*" means. Jesus really meant it! It's no figure of speech; it's the real deal! Jesus literally was raised from the dead. Bodily, physically. The disciples got to see Him up close and in person. They got to touch and handle His risen body. The resurrection is a reality - not just for Jesus but also for *all who trust in Him.*

That's us. We trust in Jesus. We have been baptised in His name. Therefore, Jesus shares His resurrection and His righteousness with us. We have been redeemed, set free, and brought into God's family. We have an eternal home awaiting us, a home with God and His people forever. If there is any better news than this, then speak up; otherwise, listen to and believe Jesus as He says, "*In My Father's house there are many rooms. If it were not so, I would have told you, because I am going to prepare a place for you. If I go to prepare a place for you, I shall also come again and take you to be with Me, that you also may be where I am*" (John 14:2-3). This sets everything else in perspective. Any sufferings we have to endure in this life - we know they are far outweighed by the glory that is in store for us. We have peace with God ***now.*** Our heavenly Father is watching out for us; He knows our needs and provides for us. Jesus is risen and ascended and is seated at God's right hand, interceding for us.¹ The Holy Spirit dwells in our hearts, the gift given in our baptism so that we shall continue steadfast in the faith and in Christ's church. We've got all this going for us, so who or what can be against us? And even if they are, God is for us. We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

With all that in mind, with all that established as a sure thing, now we can hear what following Jesus will mean for us in terms of our going to the cross. Yes, as disciples, we too shall take up a cross and follow our Master. It will mean, at times, deprivation. It will call for dedication, and it could even mean death.

Following Jesus can mean *deprivation.* A would-be disciple comes up to Jesus and says, "**I shall follow You wherever You go.**" But Jesus says to him, "**Foxes have holes, and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head.**" Following Jesus is no guarantee of financial prosperity. Indeed, it could mean the opposite - deprivation. But our heavenly Father will take care of us. He knows our needs, the basic necessities of life. He clothes the lilies of the field and feeds the birds of the air. Are you not of more value than they?² And we have riches much greater waiting for us in heaven. We have a home waiting for us that will far exceed anything we can imagine.

Following Jesus to the cross will also call for *dedication.* To another would-be disciple, Jesus says, "**Follow Me!**" This man wants to delay it, put it off, because he has other priorities he wants to tend to: "**Lord, first permit me to go back and bury my father!**" Jesus responds, "**Let the dead bury their own dead! Rather, you go and proclaim the kingdom of God!**" Yes, when Jesus calls us, this is not something to put off for a more convenient time. "*Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts,*" the writer of Hebrews says (3:15).

Yet another person says to Jesus, "**I shall follow You, Lord, but first permit me to say good-bye to those at home!**" There are no ifs, ands, or buts about the call to discipleship. Jesus says, "**No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.**" Elijah had permitted Elisha that favour, as we heard from our First Reading before.³ Jesus, however, wants no looking back. No one is fit for service in the kingdom of God who looks back. One ploughing in the field must keep looking ahead. So also the followers of Jesus.

Dear friends, we are in this for the long haul, and there are no guarantees that it will be easy. Infact, it will often be tough. People will disappoint us, *even people in the church.* Adversities will come, as will trials and tribulations. But we must not let any of these things dissuade us. We must not let them pull us apart from Christ and His church. Following Jesus to the cross will mean sticking with it, through thick and thin. Following Jesus, however, *makes all the difference.* Our Good Shepherd will be there with us, leading us all the way. Through good times and bad, even through the valley of the shadow of death⁴, Jesus will be there with us, and He will comfort and strengthen us.

So go ahead and follow Jesus. This is the same Jesus who set His face to go to Jerusalem, to endure the cross for us, so determined was He to win our salvation. And if Jesus was that determined, He will give us the determination we need to follow Him. He will help us through any deprivation we may suffer. He will give us the dedication to follow Him our whole lives, no matter what comes our way.

¹ Romans 8:34

² Matthew 6:25-34

³ 1 Kings 19:20-21

⁴ Psalm 23:4

“Follow Me!” Jesus is calling us today. Following Jesus means following Him to the cross. But that’s the best place to be. It’s the place where sins are forgiven. It’s the place that leads to resurrection. It’s the place where we learn reliance on God’s promises, and God always delivers on His promises. And He will deliver us – He already has! Truly, following Jesus in faith is the only way to go. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, we praise You for creating all things by Your power, and for sustaining the earth and all who live on it. Let us never forget Your witness to Yourself in Your creation.

Father, we praise You for revealing Yourself to us in Your Word, and for showing us Your holy will. We thank You for the inspired writers of Your wise and true Word, for through them You have shown us Your forgiving love and given us rich promises that give us hope. We praise You for Your grace in Christ Jesus, by which You have provided us our escape from Your judgment on our disobedience. Pour out Your Spirit on us so that we may grow in knowing You.

We praise You for leading us from death to life through the sufferings, death, and resurrection of Jesus, Your Son. By Your love for us, move us to love You and those about us with a love that isn’t mere words, but that is real and active. Give us sympathetic hearts for those in need, that we may share with them the things You have given us. Grant that through our love they may learn to know Your love and praise You.

We thank You that You have prepared salvation for all people, and that through the Gospel You invite all to Your kingdom. Give us opportunities to pass on Your invitation to salvation to people whom we meet in our lives, that they also may respond to Your mercy with thankful hearts. Send forth Your messengers into every corner of our world, so that the lost may rejoice in Your mercy. Continue to bless the ministry of the AELC.

Almighty Lord, guide all to whom You have given authority in our country. Bless our society with pure motives, noble goals, and moral strength. Give all Australians the desire to live before You in loving trust and obedience, frustrating any effort to diminish Your will.

Bless our homes, and make them places of true learning and love, that all who live in them may find peace and joy in harmony with You and with one another.

We pray for Your special protection and help for the sick, the sorrowful, the aged, and the lonely. We pray especially for those in our congregation who are unwell. Comfort all who have suffered material loss, and the loss of dear ones. Meet their needs with Your mercy, and show them the wonderful things You have prepared for all Your children. Father, hear our prayers, and if there is anything else we should have asked for, grant it for the sake of Jesus Christ, who has saved us, and pleads for us. Amen.

The Third Sunday after Pentecost

(Proper 8)

1 Kings 19:9b-21

^{9b} Elijah heard the Word of the LORD coming to him. He asked him: “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

¹⁰ Elijah answered: “I have been extremely jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the Israelites have abandoned Your Covenant. They have torn down Your altars and they have killed Your prophets with the sword. I am the only one left and they have been trying to take my life!”

¹¹ He said: “Come out and stand on the mountain before the LORD!”

Suddenly, as the LORD was passing by, a fierce, strong wind was tearing mountains and shattering rocks ahead of the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. ¹² After the earthquake there was a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. Then, after the fire there was the sound of a quiet whisper.

¹³ When Elijah heard that, he wrapped his cloak over his face, went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. He heard a voice asking him: “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

¹⁴ Elijah answered: “I have been extremely jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the Israelites have abandoned Your Covenant. They have torn down Your altars and they

have killed Your prophets with the sword. I am the only one left and they have been trying to take my life!”

¹⁵ The LORD told him: “Go and make your way back to the wilderness of Damascus! When you arrive there, you shall anoint Hazeal as king of Aram! ¹⁶ You shall also anoint Jehu, the son of Nimshi, as king over Israel and Elisha, the son of Shaphat from Abel-Meholah, to succeed you as prophet! ¹⁷ Jehu will put to death anyone who escapes from the sword of Hazeal, and Elisha will put to death anyone who escapes from the sword of Jehu. ¹⁸ However, I shall keep seven thousand men in Israel as a remnant, none of whom have knelt before Baal and none of whose mouths have kissed him.”

¹⁹ Elijah went from there and found Elisha, the son of Shaphat. He was ploughing behind twelve yoked pairs of oxen. He himself was with the twelfth pair. As Elijah went past him, he threw his cloak on him. ²⁰ So, Elisha left the oxen and ran after Elijah. He said, “Please let me kiss my father and mother and then let me follow you!”

Elijah told him: “Go back again! For what have I done to you?”

²¹ Elisha stopped following him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen, slaughtered them and used the yokes of the oxen to cook their meat. He gave it to the people, and they ate it. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his attendant.

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

¹ Christ has freed us that we may be free. Therefore, stand firm and do not be loaded down again by a yoke of slavery! ...

¹³ For you have been called to be free, fellow-Christians. Only do not use your freedom to give your sinful nature a starting point but through love serve one another! ¹⁴ For the whole Law is summarised in a single saying: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself!" ¹⁵ However, if you bite and devour one another, beware that you are not destroyed by one another!

¹⁶ I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you will not carry out what your sinful natures desire! ¹⁷ For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit desires what is contrary to the sinful nature. For these are opposed to each other, so that you do not do what you want to do. ¹⁸ However, if the Spirit leads you, you are not under the Law.

¹⁹ The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry, witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambitions, strife, factions, ²¹ envy; drunkenness, carousing and things like these. I warn you, as I have done before, that those who continue to do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²² However, what the Spirit produces is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. There is no law against such things. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified their sinful natures with their passions and desires. ²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also follow the Spirit!

Luke 9:51-62

⁵¹ As the time was coming nearer for Jesus to be taken up, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem. ⁵² He sent messengers ahead of Him. They went and entered a village of the Samaritans to get things ready for Him. ⁵³ However, the people did not welcome Him, because He was journeying with His face toward Jerusalem. ⁵⁴ When His disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and destroy them?"

⁵⁵ However, Jesus turned and rebuked them. ⁵⁶ Then Jesus and His disciples went on to another village.

⁵⁷ While they were walking along the road, someone told Jesus, "I shall follow You wherever You go."

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