

Proper 8C –  
June 27, a.D. 2010  
Luke 9: 51 – 62

The Christian life is not an easy one because faith does not come naturally to us. That's why faith is a gift. How else could the spiritually blind and dead have the eyes and the heartbeat of faith if God did not to give it?

We have two examples in the Gospel reading that illustrates the difficulty of following Christ. First is the cost of discipleship. It requires everything. Everything must come after Christ. If anything comes before Him, if we are not willing to part with anything except Christ, then we are not worthy of following Him and break God's First Commandment.

Christ warns disciples that following him does not guarantee wealth and success. Jesus is living proof of that during his life on earth because he had no fancy hotel suites in every town he visited. He had no money, no possessions and no property. We don't have to sell all we have in order to follow Christ, unless of course we value our things more than Him. How poor is the one who counts his pennies more valuable than faith?

The same is true when it comes to family. If our family members are more dear to us than Christ, then we are not worthy of him. While still loving, father, mother, husband, wife and children, we are not to love them more than Christ. The first commandment always comes before the fourth. In other words, the One who gave us family does not take it lightly when we place the gifts ahead of the Great Giver of all that we have.

Jesus compares discipleship with farming. The farmer in Jesus' day used plows that were pulled by animals in order to cultivate. The one who is plowing must concentrate on pushing down on the plow as it cuts the earth and at the same time, make sure the animal is walking straight along the furrow. He does this by holding a goad in his hand. A goad is a long stick to urge and prod the animal to walk straight.

What do you think happened if the farmer looked behind him, perhaps admiring what a good job he was doing? Do you think the plow could still cut and the animal still pull straight? The same holds true for God's kingdom. To place anything ahead of the Lord and his gospel means the worker is not fit for God's kingdom.

There is only one way to come and work in God's kingdom. It is by grace we are saved through faith in Christ. There is no other way. What if people reject that saving message and stubbornly insist on having God's kingdom on their terms? What if you offer someone all of the blessings of salvation and they don't want it, or else they want to change the rules to suit their own thinking and pleasure?

Here is how the sons of Thunder, James and John react when the Samaritans rejected Jesus. **“Lord do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?”** As if that was doing God a favour!

It is hard to suffer when someone doesn't want what Christ offers. It is hard to suffer if you are doing the right thing. It is hard to be a Christian. The reaction of rashness, anger and vengeance of James and John is typical but it could also be biblical. For Elijah called fire down from heaven upon a captain and fifty of his men to show that God was boss.

How enticing is it for us to invoke God's power to clean things up, to show the world who is boss, to support us when we suffer for doing the right thing?

But remember that God's kingdom is not of this world. Remember how you came into his kingdom? Was it your intelligence, patience, or any virtue that brought you God's forgiveness? What if God were to deal with us according to His justice?

Who could stand? God still has plans for people that we could never imagine. What if His thunder would have destroyed Saul of Tarsus who was persecuting the church of Christ? How could we ever know what God has in mind?

When God works faith in his kingdom, it is always in the still small voice of his Gospel that still calls sinners to faith and gives them the gifts of the kingdom.

He speaks the words: Go, your sins are forgiven. And it is so.

Go, and spread my Word. Don't look back. Don't look at yourself, for then you will never know my Peace. Look at Christ. He has done all things well. He is your salvation. Amen