

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost; July 10, 2022
+ Luke 9:51-62 +
"Follow Jesus with His Determination"

When the days were approaching for him to be taken up, Jesus was determined to go to Jerusalem. He sent messengers ahead of him. They went and entered a Samaritan village to make preparations for him. But the people did not welcome him, because he was determined to go to Jerusalem. When his disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?"

But he turned and rebuked them. "You don't know what kind of spirit is influencing you. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy people's souls, but to save them." Then they went to another village.

As they went on the way, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."

Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

He said to another man, "Follow me!"

But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."

Jesus told him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

Another man also said, "I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say good-bye to those at my home."

Jesus told him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

She looks out at the landscape of her backyard. And she makes herself a promise: This year will be different. This year the hedges will not get out of control; this year the garden beds will be weed-free and full of beautiful, tasty, vegetables. This year the grass will stay low and tidy. She is, at least for the moment, determined that this year her yard will not only remain under control, but tight and pretty.

"Dad," he says, "I want to learn to play the drums." Immediately his father's mind begins racing: all the noise he will have to endure, all the reminders he will have to give to practice, all the money he will have to pay for a new drum set. So he says, "That's nice, son. But it's going to be expensive, and playing the drums is really hard and takes a lot of practice." And his son says, "Dad, I'll do it. I promise. I won't give up." The boy is, for the moment at least, determined.

Her friend invites her to church one Sunday, and after a few weeks she wants to learn more about Jesus. She takes a class in Bible teaching, and after it's over she asks to be baptized and confirmed in the Christian faith. On the day of her baptism, she stands in the chancel and promises to follow Jesus, no matter what may come, for the rest of her life into eternal life. She is, for the moment at least, determined to follow her Savior.

On his way to Jerusalem, Jesus meets a man who appears determined to follow him: **As they went on the way, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."** "Wherever you go." That's serious determination, right? "Hell or high water, Jesus, I don't care. Wherever you go, I go!" He is determined, at least for the moment. But following Jesus means he will have to surrender every worldly comfort and pleasure: **Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has**

no place to lay his head.” We don’t know for sure how the man responded. All we hear is silence, which may tell us what we need to know about what happens to that determination to follow Jesus.

Jesus calls a second man to follow him: **He said to another man, “Follow me!” But he said, “First let me go and bury my father.”** We do not know if the man’s father is dead yet. He may be asking Jesus not for a one or two day delay, but perhaps a one or two decade delay in following Jesus, while the man stays at home until his father dies. Either way, Jesus makes it clear that following him requires the determination to place him even ahead of family: **“Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”** Jesus says, You have something the rest of your family doesn’t: faith in me. You are spiritually alive in me. Put me first. Full determination in following is Jesus’ command.

Then comes a third man, who wants not to wait for funeral, but simply to say goodbye. In the Old Testament, the prophet Elijah willingly granted this same request to his protégé Elisha. But Jesus says no. **“No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”**

What do we learn from these three exchanges? Do we learn that comforts and pleasures are evil? That we should neglect our aging fathers and show cruel indifference to our families? Of course not. The rest of Scripture makes it impossible to understand Jesus’ words that way. What we do learn is that following Jesus means you have to re-prioritize things in your life. He comes first – ahead of your comforts and pleasures, even ahead of your family and friends, even, if necessary, ahead of your own life.

So, let’s go back to that new Christian at the baptismal font who has just promised to follow Jesus. What will that look like, practically, in her everyday life?

Worship of Jesus will come first on her schedule. When she sits down to carve out her time for the week, the first thing she will do is set aside time for public worship, Bible study, and prayer. Because Jesus comes first. Jesus’ commands will come first in her life. If she has a choice between doing what Jesus commands and what her friends invite her to do, she’ll stick with what Jesus wants. Because Jesus comes first. When Satan comes and tempts her, she’ll tell him in Jesus name to shut up and shove off. Because Jesus comes first. When her own sinful nature comes calling, reminding her of all the fun she used to have before this Jesus came and took her life over, she’ll hold onto the spiritual joy and delight of knowing Christ. Because Jesus comes first. When she makes out her budget, what she gives for the work of the gospel will come off the top, joyfully and generously, and not off the bottom, as an afterthought. Because Jesus comes first. If speaking about her Savior makes others laugh at her or roll their eyes or even stop talking to her, she’ll do it anyway. Because Jesus comes first.

Does Jesus ever come anywhere but first in your life? Where? How often? I could stand here for hours and tell you all the times and places I’ve lost my determination to follow Jesus first. I condemn myself for my own failures first. I’m also called to condemn you for yours. In these three exchanges we see Jesus doesn’t just want to be first, but he wants first place all the time in every way. Full determination. But too often, my convenience, comforts, family, friends, and I myself come before following Jesus. He says, “Reorder your life and put me first.” Sometimes I say, “Nah.” He demands full determination that none of us has shown.

But, thank God, it is full determination that Jesus has shown for us.

When the days were approaching for him to be taken up, Jesus was determined to go to Jerusalem. Jesus knows what is coming. He will be taken up to heaven, but first there is pain coming to him. Not just pain,

but rejection, sadness, humiliation, and death for our sins. He has a choice to make: us first or him first? Jerusalem is the place the pain and death will come, for us and our salvation. **Jesus was determined to go to Jerusalem.** Us first.

He is so determined that he actually makes the plans for his own suffering and death: **He sent messengers ahead of him. But the people did not welcome him, because he was determined to go to Jerusalem.** The Jews of Jerusalem and the Samaritans do not care for each other. "Hated" would probably be a more accurate word. So when the people in this Samaritan town hear that Jesus is headed for Jerusalem, they refuse to help him make his preparations.

Think about what they are doing! Whether they fully realize it or not, they are actually trying to impede the Son of God from going to Jerusalem to save their own souls! And why? Just because of their petty spite for the Jews! For that they're willing to put up roadblocks to their own salvation!

It's like if you were sitting on a bomb and someone was trying to save you. They were saying, "Get up! Get off that bomb!" And you said, "Nah, because I don't like that hat you're wearing." Jesus is trying to save these people from their sins and they're saying, "Nah, cuz we don't like those people in Jerusalem where you're going." Crazy!

Of course, Jesus is God. He's also human. How tempting it must be for Jesus to listen to his disciples when they ask: **"Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?"** What will Jesus' answer be? It will be the answer that shows you just how determined he is to save human souls. Not only is he going to get to Jerusalem to pay for our sins, he still loves these silly Samaritans and wants to die for them, too. Hear his resolution: **"You don't know what kind of spirit is influencing you. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy people's souls, but to save them."** The resolve of Jesus is to save. All sinners. Even those who for petty reasons want to stand in the way.

And finally comes a very short sentence that could be easily passed over. But it's important: **Then he went on to another village.** Because the preparations will be made. The journey to Jerusalem will be traveled. The suffering and humiliation and cross will come. **"For the Son of Man did come to destroy people's souls, but to save them."** And he does it because saving us is his single-minded purpose.

With that in mind, what will I do when I sit down and schedule my week? What level of determination will I show to follow my Savior with my time? What level when I must choose between friends who are only human, and the Friend who became human to save me? Will I listen to him or voices of temptation, from outside or inside? Would I even let my own mother – and I love my mother an awful lot and I know she'd never do this, but some people do have to face this kind of decision – would I even let my own mother stop me from following Jesus? Will I let my creature comforts and pleasures block the path? How determined will I be to follow him?

You know, it would be nice if that lady looking out at her back yard maintained her will to keep it pretty and tidy this summer. And it would be nice, especially for that boy's father, if his son kept on practicing those drums and turned into the next Buddy Rich. Many places in life, it's good to be determined. But in following Jesus, eternity hangs in the balance. Following him to the end leads to life eternal. Falling away leads to eternal death.

And so, here is more good news. Not only was Jesus determined to save us, but the Spirit of God is equally determined. When you hear the good news of Jesus' divine stubbornness to get to Jerusalem to save your

soul with his suffering and death, the Spirit is working in your heart. He worked in the water of your baptism; he works in Jesus' Supper. He is working, always working, with the good news of Jesus to grow our faith in Jesus and our determination to follow him.

The three men Jesus spoke to on the way to Jerusalem had to make a choice. What will come first for me? Jesus or my comforts? Jesus or my family? There are many times every single day when we have to make choices about who or what comes first in our lives. The next time you face such a choice, remember Jesus being turned away from that Samaritan village. Remember him saying, when he had a choice between destroying and saving their souls, **"The Son of Man did not come to destroy people's souls, but to save them."** And remember that then he kept on going to the next town to make his preparations. And then he kept going to the city, to the courts, to the cross. He kept going to the resurrection and the ascension. All for you and me, to save our souls.

Remember his determination for you and, when you do, ask the Spirit to grow yours to follow him. He will, and you will. Amen.