

## Sermon 30 June 2019 Cost of following Jesus

### Luke 9:57-62

If we had to sum up this short passage in simple, colloquial language, we would say, 'Following Jesus is hard yakka!' This is so very true, and there are good reasons for this, which I will come back to.

So Jesus's response to the first man who says he would follow him wherever he went was that animals have somewhere to call home but the Messiah himself is so busy, constantly on the move and so has nowhere he can call his own, no base, no place he can retire to in order to take time out. So anyone intending to follow him, needs to understand that the same would apply to them. It is definitely not a walk in the park!

The second man, when he is asked to be a disciple of Jesus, replies that he needs to first bury his father. Jesus's response is, '*Let those who are spiritually dead care for their own dead.*'

On the surface, somewhat harsh, but let's put it into context.

A primary, even sacred duty, of a Jewish man was to look after his father until he had passed away. In other words, what this man was probably saying, 'I need to look after my father until the time comes for him leave this mortal life on earth.' But Jesus is saying, 'What I am calling you to do is very important and the longer you put it off, the less likely you will get around to doing it. Seize the day!'

In a similar vein, another man tells Jesus he will follow him but he just needs to say goodbye to his family. But Jesus tells him not to look back; that we must always be looking ahead. He uses a very good analogy of someone ploughing. This was, of course, in the days of horse-drawn ploughs, and if you didn't watch where you were going, the horse would more than likely stray from the straight and narrow, so to speak.

So in these two exchanges Jesus encapsulates very typical human failings when it comes to getting the hard jobs done. Firstly, we are inclined to procrastinate, to put off the difficult tasks and focus on the easy tasks first. I read somewhere quite recently that the secret to keeping on top of things, to achieving, is to tackle the hard jobs first. If we don't, we invariably end up being behind the eight ball. Life actually becomes much easier if we are able to tend to the hard before the easy.

Secondly, if you want to make rapid progress, don't dwell on the past. In his sermon at the Confirmation service, Bishop Ross made the point that the past is important because we learn from it and it provides a foundation, a platform for where we are going and what we want to do. He's absolutely right, but what Jesus is saying is, 'Don't dwell on it. If you want to realise your goal, look ahead.' If we set out on a journey in our car, we don't put it in reverse!

Someone said, 'Don't look back. You aren't going that way.'

The classic Bible story about the danger of looking back is that of Lot's wife (Genesis 19). God's angels told Lot to take his family and flee from Sodom so as to avoid being caught up in the impending destruction of the city due to its sinfulness. They instructed them that they were on no account to look back. However, Lot's wife disobeyed that command, she looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt. Bottom line, don't disobey God!

It reminds me of a story I heard about a Sunday School teacher telling her group this story. One of the kids replied that something like that happened to her mother. She was leaving the grocery supermarket, looked back and turned into a telephone pole. I suppose the kid got the gist of the story, or perhaps not!

The crux of the matter is this, doing God's work is hard work. He does call us to make sacrifices. God's journey is not a walk in the park. But that's one of the reasons why the rewards are so great. It is a maxim of life that the more we have to work for something, the more satisfaction and reward we receive because of it. In the end, success is brought about through hard work. Thomas Edison, the great American inventor, said, '*Success is one per cent inspiration and 99 per cent perspiration.*'

The other point that needs to be made is that it is rewarding doing God's work simply because if we are doing it as he would have us do it, we are inevitably helping others, and that in itself is rewarding. There is something about caring for others, being kind to others that actually makes us feel good about ourselves. It works both ways!

I think I related this little anecdote a couple of years ago but I will repeat it. At King's we had a community service programme run under the umbrella of the Chapel. I remember an occasion when a Year 12 girl finally got around to doing her bit as part of that programme. She had been visiting a retirement home and I was meeting the students as they returned to school and were disembarking from their taxi. She came up to me, all smiles, and said, 'Rev, I think that is the best thing I have done all year!' I think I said, 'Surprise, surprise!'

It's the old story, 'the more you give, the more you receive.' As Paul says, '*the one who plants many seeds will have a large crop.*' 2 Corinthians 9:6

Let me share with you a very well-known story, a story perhaps written for younger readers but again, a story with a very pertinent message for us all. It is written by Oscar Wilde and is

called the Happy Prince.

*High above a city stands an ornate statue of the Happy Prince, recently deceased. He oversees the town and is pained by the suffering of his people. One night, a swallow who had not gone to Egypt with his flock for the winter arrives in the city and rests on the statue of the Happy Prince. He notices that the Prince is crying and the Prince explains that during his lifetime he had lived in the palace devoid of misery, and therefore had never experienced sorrow. Now, though, he can see the suffering of his people. He then asks the swallow to distribute the gemstones and gold leaf from his body to various people in need, a task the swallow immediately undertakes. There is a lovely moment when the swallow, on returning from one of his errands, says to the Prince, 'It is strange. It is very cold but I feel quite warm.' The Prince replies, 'That, my friend, is because you have done a good deed.' And the swallow pondered on this.*

*The swallow loves the Prince and decides to stay, despite the Prince urging him to join his friends in sunny Egypt. The winter cold bites and eventually the little swallow dies. The Prince's lead heart breaks. When the town mayor finds the statue in such a decrepit state, he decides to take it down, melt it down and make an ornate statue of himself. However, they were unable to melt the lead heart so it was discarded on to the city rubbish dump, along with the dead sparrow.*

*God told his angels to bring him the two most precious things in the city. The angel brought him the lead heart and the dead sparrow. 'You have rightly chosen', said God, 'for in my garden of paradise the Happy Prince and the sparrow shall sing for evermore.'*

Let me finish by saying this, in life we get pulled in many different directions, we are frequently having to sort out just what our priorities are at any given moment – should we do this, should we do that? In the end, it is reasonably simple to decide because all we have to do is ask ourselves, 'What would Jesus have us do right now?' It is a question that I believe should determine our actions and direction on an everyday basis.

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