

## Sermon 26 June 2022 Cost of following Jesus

### Luke 9:57-62

If we had to sum up this short passage in simple, colloquial language, we could say, 'Following Jesus is hard yakka!' And no truer word could be spoken. There are good reasons for this, which I will come back to.

So Jesus' response to the first man who says he would follow him wherever he went was that animals have somewhere to call home but the Son of Man 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 asked to be a disciple of Jesus, replies that he needs to first bury his father. Jesus' 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 passed away (*father, not mother!*). In other words, what this man was probably saying was, 'I need to look after my father until the time comes for him to leave this mortal life on earth.' But Jesus is saying, 'What I am calling you to 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 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.

The classic Bible story about the danger of looking back is that of Lot's wife. God's angels told Lot to take his family and flee from the city of 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. Moral of the story – don't disobey God.

It reminds me of the story about a Sunday School teacher telling her group this story. One of the kids replied that something like that happened to his mother. She was leaving the supermarket, looked back and turned into a telephone pole.

The crux of the matter is this: doing God's work is hard work. He does call on 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. Let me share what is quite a well-known story.

Eric Liddell was England's fastest 100 yards runner in 1924. Everyone expected him to win the gold medal at the Olympics in Paris that year. But then came the bombshell. When the Olympic schedule came out, the 100 yards event was programmed to run on a Sunday. The problem was this – Eric had strong Christian beliefs, which included Sunday being kept purely for the Lord. No other activities whatsoever should be taken part in, even running for your country. Eric was crestfallen.

Incredible pressure was put on him. The Prince of Wales even tried to get him to change his mind, but his mind was made up. English newspapers called him a traitor.

Eric met with his coaches and suggested that a teammate run in his place in the 100 yards event and he would run in the 400 yards, even though he had never run a 400 yards event in his life. And guess what! He won the gold medal. Unbelievable.

In 1980 someone had the idea of making a movie about Eric and the 1924 Olympics. Eric's surviving wife said, 'Who would be interested in an event so long ago about a man who wouldn't run on Sundays because of his Christian beliefs?'

As it turned out, millions of people were tremendously interested. The movie, *Chariots of Fire*, not only broke box office records, but it won the 1982 award for Best Picture. As an aside, during my time as Chaplain at King's, I used clips from the movie on numerous occasions to illustrate what it meant to be a follower of Jesus.

The story of Eric Liddell encapsulates the message contained in our Gospel reading. Being a follower of Jesus is not a walk in the park. It calls for commitment, being prepared to make sacrifices, being totally true to your belief, and never give up. If we can do that, the regards will come.

I should also point out that Eric Liddell spent an hour every morning preparing for his day by reading the Bible and praying. That's commitment. That's devotion to what you believe in. What a wonderful role model.

Let me finish by saying this: in life we get pulled in many directions, we are frequently having to sort out just what our priorities are at any given moment, just as Eric Liddell had to do. Should we do this, should we do that? How do we respond to this situation? How do we conduct ourselves in this particular situation? In the end, it is reasonably simple to decide because all we have to do is ask ourselves, What would Jesus have me do right now? It is a question that I believe should determine our actions and directions on an everyday basis.

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