

## **Year C-Pentecost3-proper8-Considering the Cost**

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**Luke 9:51-62**

### **Considering the Cost**

When the disciples aren't met with a warm welcome by their ancient enemy double, the Samaritans, they were so sure Jesus would want revenge on them they asked Jesus if they should call fire down. The idea of destroying the Samaritans was so attractive; a perceived slight was all it took to bring it into consciousness. Everywhere he goes most people claim rivalry and violence as their true home and depend on it for their security. No wonder Jesus says, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." Even as the disciples ask for permission to destroy this Samaritan village, the reason Jesus has bypassed the village was not because they didn't want him there; it was because his face was set toward Jerusalem. The disciples question underlines why he must go to the city on a hill. He must show them God loves them all; Jew and Samaritan, and will not draw fire down upon them; instead he draws fire down upon himself. The fire he draws is not divine fire but human fire; the fire we visit on ourselves and each other.

With this attitude toward Samaritans I wonder how they presented themselves when they came into their village. The text only tells us that Jesus sent messengers ahead of him. He didn't tell them where to go. Maybe they entered the village with arrogance and a swagger, a cocky demeanor that non-verbally told their hosts they had all the power and could destroy the Samaritans if they wanted because they had Jesus, the true Son of God on their side. They knew their God was the true God that can only be worshipped in Jerusalem. The Samaritans were half-breeds who worshiped on a mountain that God didn't recognize or so they thought. If this were their attitude does it surprise you the Samaritans didn't receive them?

In my younger days I pictured Jesus being turned away by those nasty Samaritans who maybe even deserve to be punished were it not for the kindness of Jesus. No doubt I had heard preaching centered on the Samaritan's rejection of Jesus with the point that we should not be like them and reject him too. But that isn't what the text says; it says, "They did not receive him because his face was set toward Jerusalem." He didn't want to stop in the Samaritan village because he was in a hurry to get to Jerusalem. Maybe he wanted to get there in time for Passover. Maybe he knew that his life, death and resurrection would be a kind of Passover for the whole world. He wanted to move all humans' understanding of the love of God from us versus them where our God is pitted against your God, to the radical awareness that God loves

all his creation. To make that point he was prepared to die at our hands so that we could see what we do. His connection to God and God's inextinguishable effervescence would find expression in the resurrection. All of this would demonstrate that love can't be killed and is, in fact, the driving force of the cosmos.

To say this right and to have the profound meaning residing not only in his words but his actions, he must get to Jerusalem on time. As the text says, "When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem." The time was right. The stars were in alignment. This was the reason he bypassed the Samaritan village. It was nothing personal; it was not because the disciples said these 2<sup>nd</sup> class people didn't like him.

When James and John made their suggestion to Jesus, Jesus didn't sit down and go into a lecture on non-violence. He knew they wouldn't be able to understand until after the event he was going to Jerusalem to fulfill, so he just turned toward them, rebuked them and went on his way to another village.

"As they were going along the road, someone said to him, 'I will follow you wherever you go.'" I wonder if Jesus knew that his disciples would quickly abandon him and scatter when Jesus was taken into custody. Knowing what we know now, the person's statement seems like bravado. I am sure he meant it at the time. I experience Jesus' next response as gentle, self-revealing and containing no shame toward the person. "Jesus said to him, foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." Is he saying there is no room in the world for him? The world is a violent place where power and revenge rule and he is a man of non-violence, forgiveness and a weakness that saves but only after suffering? Undoubtedly his mood is pensive as they travel toward Jerusalem. His hard-hearted disciples have just demonstrated again why his fatal journey is necessary. Yes indeed, foxes have holes and birds have nests but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head in this world where "the satan" rules among humans. We move on.

"To another he said, 'Follow me.'" The person replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." That sounds reasonable to me. Burying your father counts among the most important things we should do in the course of our lives. What can Jesus possibly mean? Maybe we can catch a hint in Jesus' reply. "But Jesus said to him, 'Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.'" Wow, we are going to have to think about that! That sounds harsh and cold. I have read this passage many times and tried to preach on it more than once but this time for the first time the phrase "go and proclaim the kingdom of God" stuck out to me. To proclaim the kingdom of God is to witness to how much God has done, is doing and will do for us. It is to announce that we have discovered God to be all love and this love is so dense it will not allow our separation from it.

Can you see how that proclamation is more important than going to bury your loved one? It is hope filled because it puts an entirely new frame around their burial. It changes their burial from a grim duty to a hopeful absence. It is only if we are unaware of this effervescent reality that we would bury them with no hope and then it would be the dead burying the dead. Proclaiming the kingdom of God changes the emotional coloration of a loved one's burial from grey to whatever color is most hopeful to us.

Finally we come to the last person exploring the possibility of following Jesus. This one said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." "Jesus said to him, 'No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.'" Is Jesus encouraging impulsive, irresponsible, non-relational walking out on commitments?

I can understand how when you are plowing you must fix your eyes on some object in front of you or your furrow will wander. I can also understand how distractions that cause you to look back can interfere with your work. So what does Jesus mean? I suppose he could be saying if you don't keep your eyes on the kingdom of God and interpret the world through that lens you won't do a very good job of being his follower.

I will end with a personal illustration. A month ago our computer consultant told us we will have to get new computers by January of 2020 because Microsoft will stop supporting Windows 7 and our old machines won't run Windows 10. I began looking at computers and quickly became obsessed with figuring out which is the latest, greatest, flashiest, lightest, brightest, most flexible and oh, by the way, most expensive. I asked my no-nonsense Mr. Spook-like computer wizard and he advised me toward the very powerful, black-drab machine that will do everything and more and I was unhappy with his advice. A part of me wants those flashy machines that other people look at and say "wow." So I have two sets of desires competing within me. Which aligns most closely with the kingdom of God? I leave it to you to decide. Amen.