

Luke 9:51-62

<sup>51</sup> As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. <sup>52</sup> And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; <sup>53</sup> but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem.

<sup>54</sup> When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" <sup>55</sup> But Jesus turned and rebuked them. <sup>56</sup> Then he and his disciples went to another village.

<sup>57</sup> As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."

<sup>58</sup> Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

<sup>59</sup> He said to another man, "Follow me."

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

<sup>60</sup> Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

<sup>61</sup> Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family."

<sup>62</sup> Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

AN ANCIENT SYMBOL OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH IS A SHIP. AND ON THE SEAS OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY IT MAY SEEM LIKE THE SHIP IS IN TROUBLE.

INDEED, WORRYING ABOUT WHERE WE OR OTHERS PLACE THE DECK CHAIRS MAY SEEM LIKE AN ACT AS FUTILE AS IT WAS ON THE SINKING TITANIC.

HOWEVER, WHILE THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN GENERAL, AS WELL AS OUR DENOMINATION, MAY BE IN ROUGH WATERS WE ARE NOT IN DANGER OF SINKING.

AT THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY MEETING ON ZOOM WE WERE REMINDED THE CHURCH IS VERY MUCH ALIVE, BUT IT IS REFORMING-MEANING NEEDING TO ADAPT TO CHANGES.

CHANGE REQUIRES MORE THAN JUST ACCEPTANCE; IT NEEDS OUR ACTIVE PARTICIPATION WITH GOD.

THEREFORE, WHERE WE PLACE OUR DECK CHAIRS DOES HAVE SIGNIFICANCE, AS EXPRESSED IN AN OLD PEANUTS STORYLINE.

ONE DAY CHARLIE WENT TO LUCY SEEKING ADVICE FROM HER WHILE SHE WAS SITTING AT HER PSYCHIATRIST. BOOTH.

CHARLIE BROWN SOUGHT HER COUNSEL TO HELP HIM FIND THE MEANING OF LIFE. SHE RESPONDED WITH ONE OF HER FAMOUS SAYINGS:

"LIFE IS LIKE A CRUISE SHIP, CHARLIE BROWN. SOME PEOPLE PLACE THEIR DECK CHAIRS AT THE REAR OF THE SHIP TO SEE WHERE THEY HAVE BEEN.

OTHERS PLACE THEIR CHAIRS IN THE FRONT SO THEY CAN SEE WHERE THEY ARE GOING. WHERE DO YOU PLACE YOUR CHAIR?

HE RESPONDS – "PLACE IT? I CAN'T EVEN GET MY DECK CHAIR UNFOLDED!"

SOME OF US MAY FEEL THE SAME WAY AT TIMES, EITHER ABOUT LIFE IN GENERAL OR OUR DISCIPLESHIP, WE STRUGGLE TO GET OUR DECK CHAIR OPEN.

WE KNOW GOD WANTS US TO DO SOMETHING, BUT WE CAN'T SEEM TO GET A HANDLE ON WHAT WE ARE SUPPOSE TO DO.

BUT, WHEN WE DO GET OUR CHAIR OPEN, IT IS IMPORTANT TO CONSIDER WHERE WE PLACE IT- LOOKING BACK OR LOOKING FORWARD.

THE SAVIOR IS WELL AWARE OF OUR NEED TO REMEMBER AND HONOR THINGS IN THE PAST, AND TO KEEP SOME TRADITIONS, OR TO ACKNOWLEDGE AND REPENT OF PAST SINS.

BUT IF WE FIX OUR EYES ON THE PAST WE WILL NEVER SEE WHERE JESUS IS LEADING US IN THE PRESENT AND FUTURE.

ANOTHER PROBLEM WITH LOOKING BACKWARD, EVEN AT SOMETHING WHICH HAS JUST HAPPENED, IS FOUND IN THE GOSPEL STORY.

JESUS HAD FIXED HIS EYES, FOCUSED HIS ATTENTION ON JERUSALEM AND THE CROSS. AND HE MOVED FORWARD. ALONG THE WAY HE WANTED TO STOP IN A CERTAIN VILLAGE.

HOWEVER, THE SAMARITANS WHO LIVED THERE DID NOT WELCOME JESUS. AND IN THAT CULTURE AND TIME, REFUSING HOSPITALITY WAS LIKE A SLAP IN THE FACE.

THIS FILLED A COUPLE OF THE DISCIPLES WITH WHAT THEY MIGHT HAVE THOUGHT WAS RIGHTEOUS INDIGNATION, BUT WAS ACTUALLY AN UNRIGHTEOUS ATTITUDE.

THEY OFFERED TO ASK GOD TO PUNISH THEM BECAUSE THE SAMARITANS DID NOT WELCOME, AND THUS DISRESPECTED JESUS.

THE INTERESTING THING ABOUT THE INCIDENT IS THAT JESUS NEITHER SHOWED NOR EXPRESSED ANGER TOWARDS THOSE WHO REJECTED HIM.

HOWEVER, HE DID GET ANGRY WITH THE DISCIPLES WHO WANTED TO HURT THOSE WHO REJECTED JESUS.

HERE IS A LESSON FOR INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIANS AND FOR CHURCHES-JESUS HAS NOT COMMISSIONED US TO BE HIS AVENGING ANGELS.

INSTEAD, WE ARE SENT AS HIS AMBASSADORS- TO DELIVER CHRIST'S MESSAGE OF LOVE IN BOTH WORD AND DEED.

WHEN IT COMES TO THOSE WHO REJECT JESUS AND US AS CHRISTIANS, WE NEED TO "TRUST IN THE LORD AND LEAN NOT ON OUR OWN UNDERSTANDING".

THE SAYING "LET GO AND LET GOD", INCLUDES LEAVING GOD TO CHOOSE HOW TO RESPOND TO THOSE WHO REJECT HIS SON.

CHRISTIANS THROUGHOUT THE CENTURIES AND EVEN TODAY FORGET THIS.

SOME HAVE, AND A FEW STILL DO, SEEK TO AVENGE THOSE WHO GO AGAINST GOD OR HIS WILL, THROUGH VIOLENT WORDS OR ACTIONS.

AND BESIDES THE OBVIOUS SIN THOSE KINDS OF REACTIONS ARE, BEING AVENGING ANGELS INTERFERES WITH CHRIST'S CALL FOR US TO SPREAD THE GOSPEL.

THEREFORE, WHEN REJECTED, WE DO BETTER BY FOLLOWING JESUS' EXAMPLE OF WALKING AWAY AND MOVING FORWARD ON OUR MISSION.

TO RETURN TO THE SHIP ANALOGY WE NEED TO FACE OUR DECK CHAIRS FORWARD.

DOING SO MEANS THAT WHILE WE MAY GLANCE BACK AT THE PAST ON OCCASION, OUR FOCUS NEEDS TO BE ON WHERE WE ARE AND WHERE WE ARE GOING.

BUT, OF COURSE, JESUS WANTS US TO DO MORE THAN SIMPLY GO ALONG FOR THE RIDE AND RELAX WHILE WE GAZE AT WHAT OUR EYES SEE.

WHEN IT COMES TO BEING A DISCIPLE OF JESUS COMMITMENT IS THE KEY, AND THAT MEANS ACTION.

UNFORTUNATELY STAYING COMMITTED IS NOT EASY WHEN SO MANY WORLDLY OFFERINGS OR OBLIGATIONS CAN DISTRACT EVEN THE SINCEREST FOLLOWER OF CHRIST.

THIS BRINGS US BACK TO THE SECOND HALF OF THE GOSPEL STORY AND THREE MEN WHO NEVER GOT THEIR CHAIRS OPEN, SO THEY DID NOT FOLLOW JESUS.

THE FIRST ONE WE ENCOUNTER WAS PERHAPS SEEKING TO SHARE IN WHAT HE SAW AS JESUS' POPULARITY.

JESUS' POINTED OUT THAT FOLLOWING HIM OUGHT NOT TO BE THOUGHT OF AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR WORDILY PRESTIGE, BUT RATHER IT MEANT AN UNCERTAIN EARTHLY FUTURE.

IT WAS THE DANGER OF BEING ONE OF HIS DISCIPLES JESUS WANTED THE MAN TO CONSIDER.

REMEMBER, JESUS WAS GOING TO THE CROSS; AND THAT WAS A PLACE NOT EVEN HIS CLOSEST DISCIPLES HAD THE COURAGE TO FOLLOW HIM.

IT IS NO WONDER JESUS SOUGHT TO WARN THOSE WHO WALKED WITH, OR WANTED TO JOIN HIM -THEY WOULD HAVE TO TRUST THEIR VERY SURVIVAL TO GOD'S CARE.

THIS BRINGS US TO THE LAST TWO EXAMPLES OF THOSE WHO STRUGGLED TO WALK THE ROAD OF TRUST AND COMMITMENT WITH THE LORD.

THE SAVIOR'S WORDS TO EACH MAN MAY SOUND HARSH TO OUR EARS, AND YET GIVEN THE FACT JESUS KNEW HIS TIME WAS SHORT AND HIS MISSION URGENT, THEY DO MAKE SENSE.

THE FIRST MAN, HEARD JESUS' CALL TO FOLLOW BUT HE HESITATED TO GO RIGHT THEN AND THERE, SIGHTING FAMILY OBLIGATIONS.

IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT SINCE MOST-BURIALS HAPPENED WITHIN A DAY OF A DEATH, IF THE MAN'S FATHER WAS ALREADY DEAD HIS SON WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN OUT IN PUBLIC.

AND JESUS, WHO LEFT HIS OWN MOTHER IN ORDER TO PROCLAIM THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN WAS AT HAND, AND THEN GO TO THE CROSS FOR THE SAKE OF THE WORLD, SHOWS US THAT DUTY TO GOD COMES FIRST.

REMEMBER ALSO, THE SON'S OF ZEBEDEE, THEY DROPPED THEIR NETS AND LEFT THEIR FATHER WHOM THEY WERE WITH THE MOMENT JESUS CALLED THEM TO FOLLOW.

BUT WHEN JESUS CALLED THE MAN THAT DAY-HE HESITATED TO IMMEDIATELY FOLLOW, MAKING THE EXCUSE OF OTHER OBLIGATIONS.

SIMILARLY, WHEN ANOTHER MAN OFFERED TO FOLLOW JESUS, AS SOON AS HE SAID GOODBYE TO HIS FAMILY, JESUS WOULD NOT WAIT FOR HIM.

IF JESUS' RESPONSE TO EACH MAN STILL SOUNDS HARSH AND UNCOMPROMISING- IT MAY BE HELPFUL TO LOOK AT THE LARGER PICTURE.

AT THE HEART OF BEING A DISCIPLE OF JESUS, IS THE WILLINGNESS TO OBEY HIM, EVEN WHEN IT IS NOT CONVENIENT.

THIS IS WHAT JESUS WAS CALLING HIS DISCIPLES THEN, AND IS CONTINUING TO CALL HIS DISCIPLES AND WOULD BE DISCIPLES TO DO TODAY.

ALL THAT REMAINS IS FOR EACH ONE OF US TO ASK OURSELVES- "DO I TRUST THE LORD ENOUGH TO FOLLOW THE SAVIOR WHEN HE CALLS?"

TRUSTING IN GOD IS A KEY ELEMENT OF THE CHRISTIAN JOURNEY. FIRST, WE MUST TRUST HIM WITH OUR SALVATION.

WE ALSO MUST TRUST GOD TO LEAD US AND EQUIP US IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE AND OUR SERVICE TO JESUS.

FINALLY, WE MUST TRUST THAT GOD KNOWS WHAT HE IS DOING, WHERE HE IS TAKING US IN OUR SERVICE, AND ALSO KNOWS WHAT IS BEST FOR US.

LETTING THE LORD TAKE THE LEAD IN OUR LIVES IS OFTEN A CHALLENGE BECAUSE WE THINK DIFFERENTLY THAN GOD.

REMEMBER ISAIAH 55:8, WHICH SAYS: "FOR MY THOUGHTS ARE NOT YOUR THOUGHTS, NEITHER ARE YOUR WAYS MY WAYS, SAITH THE LORD."

HERE IS AN ILLUSTRATION OF HOW THIS CAN WORKOUT WHEN IT COMES TO NOT JUST LOOKING FORWARD, BUT ALSO MOVING FORWARD AT GOD'S DIRECTION.

THERE IS A MEDITATION ON CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP THAT USES A CAR TO ILLUSTRATE THE DYNAMICS THAT CAN OCCUR BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND JESUS.

THE AUTHOR BEGINS BY SAYING THAT AS THE OWNER OF THE CAR HE IS ALSO THE LORD OF THAT CAR, AND AS SUCH CAN DO WITH IT WHAT HE PLEASES.

BUT SUPPOSE, THE CAR HAD FREE WILL AND WAS ABLE TO COOPERATE WITH HIM, OR NOT.

THIS WOULD MEAN THE CAR MIGHT DECIDE NOT TO RUN ONE DAY, OR NOT TO TAKE HIM BY THE ROUTE HE WISHED TO TRAVEL.

OR IT MIGHT BECOME FEARFUL OF VENTURING INTO NEW TERRITORY.

AND SO, THE MAN IMAGINED HIS CAR STOPPING ON THE SIDE OF THE ROAD, AS HE IS ABOUT TO DRIVE AWAY FROM FAMILIAR SURROUNDINGS.

THE CAR SAYS- "WHERE IS THIS WE ARE GOING?... THIS NEW PLACE YOU WANT ME TO GO TO LOOKS SCARY.

I'M NOT SURE I HAVE ENOUGH GAS TO GET WHERE YOU WANT TO GO; YOU BETTER FILL UP MY TANK FIRST."

AND EVEN AFTER HE ASSURES THE CAR ABOUT THE JOURNEY, AND SAYS IT HAS PLENTY OF GAS, IT STILL DOES NOT COMPLETELY TRUST THE OWNER AND SO REFUSES TO MOVE.

THE IDEA OF A CAR HAVING A WILL AND A MIND OF ITS OWN TO THAT DEGREE OF AWARENESS IS SILLY, BUT THE POINT OF THE STORY IS ABOUT CHRISTIANS NOT CARS.

AND THE BIGGEST PROBLEM WITH PEOPLE IS THE FACT THAT GOD HAS GRANTED US FREEWILL, AND HAS CHOSEN NOT TO DEPRIVE US- EVEN OF THE RIGHT MAKE THE WRONG CHOICE.

CONSEQUENTLY, WE OFTEN FAIL TO FOLLOW JESUS AS WE ARE EMPOWERED TO DO.

WE FAIL BECAUSE WE ARE AFRAID OF THE UNKNOWN, OR WE LACK TRUST IN GOD, OR BECAUSE WE THINK OUR OTHER OBLIGATIONS ARE MORE IMPORTANT.

WE MAY EVEN FAIL TO OBEY GOD BECAUSE WE CAN SEE EXACTLY WHERE GOD IS SENDING US AND WE DO NOT WANT TO GO THERE.

THE GOOD NEWS IS GOD WILL NOT FORCE US, THE BAD NEWS IS GOD MAY CHOOSE TO ACT OR REFUSE TO ACT IN WAYS THAT WORK TO PERSUADE US TO OBEY.

THE STORY OF JONAH IS AN EXAMPLE OF THIS WHEN GOD SENT HIM TO NINEVEH, HE RAN IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION.

BUT GOD THROUGH A STORM AND A WHALE CONVINCED JONAH IT WAS IN HIS BEST INTEREST TO OBEY THE LORD.

MAY WE BE LESS STUBBORN THAN JONAH WAS, AND MORE COMMITTED THAN THOSE IN THE GOSPEL STORY WHO HESITATED TO FOLLOW JESUS.

MAY WE GROW IN OUR OBEDIENCE TO THE LORD AND OUR WILLINGNESS TO WORK ACCORDING TO GOD'S TIMING AND DIRECTION.

SO LET US SEEK TO OPEN OUR DECK CHAIRS, OUR LIVES AND WILLS TO JESUS AND HEED HIS CALL TO US AS INDIVIDUALS AND AS A CHURCH.

LET US PRAY: LORD JESUS, WE KNOW THERE ARE TIMES YOU CALL EACH OF US TO TAKE UP OUR CROSS AND FOLLOW YOU.

SEND YOUR SPIRIT, WE PRAY, TO INSPIRE AND EMPOWER US TO HEED YOUR CALL FOLLOW YOU.

GIVE US, WE PRAY, THE WISDOM AND COURAGE TO GO WHEN AND WHERE YOU SEND US.

AND HELP US GROW IN OUR ABILITY TO TRUST YOU AND YOUR LOVE FOR US. AMEN.

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