

Sine Domino Frustra Laboramus

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
June 27 2010  
Glendale Lutheran Church

FIT FOR SERVICE

Luke 9:51-62

I.

The Gospel text with which we are confronted this day is a hard saying, not because its context and meaning is indiscernible, but because of its implications for a person's life of discipleship. DISCIPLESHIP = TO LEARN OF JESUS (through study and meditation upon the Word); TO LEARN FROM JESUS (follow the heart and mind of Jesus) AND TO CONFESS WITH MY HEART AND LIPS THAT JESUS IS MY SAVIOR FROM SIN AND LORD OF MY LIFE (until I take my last breath.)

Squarely, there are two lessons here rolled into one. The first: the Samaritans' rejection of Jesus and the disciples' request to bring down fire from heaven – like Elijah did with the prophets of Baal – to destroy the lot of them. That Jesus was rejected by the Samaritans was only a foretaste of what was to come, only on a grander scale. Earlier in this same chapter, Jesus forewarned the disciples that he must “suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.” He would also be betrayed by Judas and denied by Peter; he would see these same disciples run from his side; he would even for a time on the cross be separated from the Father. The cruelest part of the cross was that he was made to endure it alone, just as the prophet Isaiah had written so long ago –“He was despised and rejected

by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”

## II.

The second part of this lesson is even more disconcerting. On three occasions, persons approached Jesus and expressed their willingness to follow Jesus wherever he went. Jesus’ reply is not what we might expect. Instead of saying, “Welcome to the team!” or “It’s great to have someone on my side for a change,” Jesus said to the first disciple-wannabe that the Son of man has no place to lay his head, thus forfeiting any and all of the securities and comforts with which we have become accustomed. Two others offer to follow Jesus when they can – on their terms – one after he has buried his father and the other after he has said goodbye to his family. Those sound like reasonable concerns to me; they surely were to Elijah when Elisha asked to do the same. Is not care and concern for family needs permissible, even requisite, to be ‘fit for service’ in the kingdom. Of course. So why was Jesus so harsh and uncompromising? Go back to the first verse of this text, which is a watershed in Luke’s Gospel: “As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus *resolutely set out for Jerusalem*. Other translations say, “set his face toward Jerusalem.” For it was at Jerusalem where his enemies were waiting for him; it was at Jerusalem where all that he said would happen happened; it was at Jerusalem where the cross awaited him, the ultimate selfless act of service and sacrifice necessary to redeem a world from its sin and for its eternal salvation. He simply would not, and could not, waver from the Father’s purpose for him on this earth. That puts this whole business about letting the dead bury the dead and saying goodbye to family into its proper perspective. There is a sense of urgency in this text, a sense of single-mindedness, a sense of commitment

from which a follower of Jesus Christ cannot allow himself or herself to be diverted. Discipleship, says Jesus, has choices, and those choices often carry consequences.

### III.

The theme for this sermon is taken from Jesus' last words in this text: "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is FIT FOR SERVICE in the kingdom of God." A colleague and sort-of classmate of mine, Rev. Michael Ernst, wrote in *Concordia Pulpit Resources*, "Most of us city folk are inexperienced at plowing. But most of us have mowed a lawn. Have you ever tried to mow a straight track while looking behind you? It's impossible. Yet so often in the church it seems we are trying to just that; we look back to the 'glory days' rather than straining ahead to meet the needs of people in this day and age, needs which are often urgent."

Two temptations come to my mind here. One is the nasty distractions we have to divert us from discipleship. Our lives are so cluttered with so many demands upon our time and energy and even financial resources that we forget whose we are and why we have been put on this earth, which is to serve the Lord with gladness and to use whatever and whomever the Lord has given to us as ways of growing into a deeper relationship with Christ and drawing those whom we love into that relationship as well.

The second temptation is to live with an attitude which loses the sense of urgency of following Christ Jesus, of saying, in essence, there's no hurry about stepping in line with Christ's call to us and claim upon us. There will always be another tomorrow for me to get my spiritual house in order, after I have neatly and carefully planned for my own needs and desires. We know better than that, of course, but it is still a huge temptation. And I wish I could say that "the older we get the more we understand that" but that's not

necessarily true, and neither discipleship nor the urgency of the cross has no sense of age.

Jesus looked forward, not back; he looked forward not to much to the pain of his own death but to completion of the Father's sole, single purpose for him on this earth; perform the act of salvation for the entire world. (This is such a trite comparison, but I listened a week or so ago to President Obama's schedule for the week; every day, it seemed, he was addressing a different, urgent issue – the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, health care, the economy, meeting with the head of state from Russia and I thought, "Good grief! And I think my schedule's full!") And then I put that within the context of what was on the shoulders of our Lord as he journeyed to Jerusalem – the eternal welfare of the entire world – there is no comparison to that, not even trite!

#### IV.

So what does it mean to be "fit for service?" first of all, it means to know who and what Christ is. He is not our miracle worker; he has not come to this world to make our life easier or more comfortable. He is our Savior and the Lord of your Life! He has our lives now and forevermore in his omnipotent and grace-full hands.

Secondly, it means that we live sacrificially. What we do with our time, with our relationships, with our resources, is all part of that. It is a misnomer to think that we ought separate our lives of discipleship with the challenges and tasks of our lives and living, not if we believe that God put us right here right now. How we respond to the needs of other people, to those who are hurting or oppressed, to those who make demands upon us, and those who test our patience, are all reflections of the demands of discipleship upon us, and that calls for urgent, ongoing, persistent prayer for direction and courage.

Thirdly, it means to take risks that are inherent in being a follower of Jesus Christ. It is imperative that I – I, as a person and as a pastor – and you, as a person and whatever else you would add to your list of vocations and professions -- daily seek God’s will and way for me, and to say in faith, “Lord, take me where and with whom you so desire, and give me faith to humbly follow you.”

And, finally, it means that I must decrease so that Christ must increase. Theology of the cross is about ensuring that nothing must stand between me and my Savior, not temptations, not schedules, not family commitments, not pleasures, nothing. Theology of the cross is about lifting up Jesus wherever we are and in whatever circumstance. It is about resolve, commitment, devotion, priority.

#### V.

I warned you that this text is a hard saying, at least it has been for me. It has caused me to examine my own level of resolve, commitment, devotion, priority. More than anything else, it has caused me to thank God – with my heart and life and all my being – that Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem. What if he had first shown the Samaritans a thing or two about his Father’s power? What if he had waited for these disciple-wannabes to take care of their business before he took care of his? What if anything, anything at all, had delayed, or even postponed his journey to the cross? Thanks the Lord, yea, thank the Lord, for his unsurpassable resolve, commitment, devotion, priority. And, thank the Lord, for calling us to discipleship.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.