

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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SERIES: *On the Road With Jesus*

SCRIPTURE: *Luke 9:18-24, 51-62*

SERMON: *Setting Out*

DATE: *August 1st, 2021*

(Acknowledgement to Tim Keller for his series of Sermons on "The Meaning of Jesus.")

Our Scripture text for this morning is found in Luke's gospel, chapter 9, verses 18 through 24, and verses 51 through 62.

Luke 9:18-24 Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, "Who do the crowds say I am?"

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life."

"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Peter answered, "The Christ of God."

Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone. And he said, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life."

Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it."

Luke 9:51-62 As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him, because he was headed to Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" But Jesus turned and rebuked them, and they went to another village.

As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.”

Jesus replied, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”

He said to another man, “Follow me.”

But the man replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”

Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”

Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family.”

Jesus replied, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”

We’re in Luke’s gospel, and what he does is take the first 8 chapters to ask and answer this question: **“Who is Jesus?”**.

But then starting here in the middle of chapter 9, there is a noticeable shift as Luke now begins to show us **“What it looks like to follow Jesus.”**

In this morning’s passage, we see that Jesus is setting out for Jerusalem, and the Cross awaits at the end of His journey. Along the way, Jesus is going to be doing some really good teaching about how a follower of Him will live.

Our sermon series is called **On the Road With Jesus**, and over the course of the next 4 weeks, we’re going to join those first disciples and walk on this road with Jesus and just soak in His teaching because we’re His disciples too.

Let me just start this series by putting this right in front of you...your pastors and the Church Board here at Five Forks have been feeling a renewed sense of purpose when it comes to discipleship. We want to continue to encourage people to make the initial commitment to Jesus, but we don’t want to treat discipleship - that daily commitment – as an afterthought.

And so back in May, the Church Board set aside an evening to come together and talk about nothing except Discipleship...what it is, and what it looks like at Five Forks. And we're going to be looking to Jesus to help show us the way.

Our sermon for this morning is called **Setting Out**, Jesus is setting out for Jerusalem and we're going to go with Him. Every week we'll begin be looking at these 3 things:

What's Happening

What We Don't Want To Miss.

The Next Step that Jesus is asking each of us to take in light of His teaching?

So let's get ready to get on the road by looking at...

1. WHAT'S HAPPENING

...here in chapter 9.

After living most of His life in relative obscurity, around the age of 30 Jesus launches what ends up being 3 years of public, highly visible ministry.

First year: The launch...baptism, 40 days in the wilderness, He walks into the synagogue and announces that He is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy...He invites those who would be the very first disciples to "Come, follow me."

Second year: Popularity. Large crowds drawn to Him, following Him because of the authority by which He spoke, and His life-giving approach to all He encountered, especially those who were hurting.

Third year: Opposition. His popularity did not sit well with the religious establishment, as Jesus had little use for their traditions. The religious leaders became vocal opponents of Jesus, and made all kinds of accusations against Him.

As Jesus is about to set out on this journey to Jerusalem, we find ourselves in this third year, because Luke has told us that the time is approaching for Jesus to leave this world...

As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. V.51

...not to mention Jesus' ominous words about being put to death in Jerusalem by the religious leaders, which gives us a sense that the opposition is in full swing.

Next question: Is Jerusalem just down the road, or a long way down the road? Even if you're one that doesn't like geography, this is pretty simple: ancient Palestine was divided into three regions (**map**), Galilee up north, Judea down south which is where you would find Jerusalem....with Samaria right there in the middle. And the Jews - whether from Galilee or Judea - despised the Samaritans because they regarded them as half-breeds, not fully Jewish...and the Samaritans despised the Jews in return.

Here in chapter 9 Jesus and His disciples are up north in Galilee, and have been for some time. It's here that Peter proclaims that Jesus is the Christ, answering that question that Luke has been asking for the first 8 chapters: "Who is Jesus?"

Once they are on the road, Jesus sent a group ahead into a Samaritan village to get things ready for Him, and when He wasn't welcomed there, James and John take umbrage and approach Jesus with what seems like a pretty extreme request.

Luke 9:54a "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?"

What's that about? There are numerous options when we encounter someone who is less than welcoming, but what they want to do seems a bit extreme. And Jesus calls them on it, and they simply continue on their way.

On their way, Luke describes a number of encounters that Jesus had with three different men at various points along the road. What's striking about them is that it appears that these men are willing, even eager to follow Jesus...and yet Jesus comes across as somewhat blunt, doesn't He?

Let's stop here because if we want to learn what it looks like to follow Jesus, there are a couple of things that we don't want to miss.

2. WHAT WE DON'T WANT TO MISS

The first thing we don't want to miss is...

A. Peter's Proclamation

Jesus asks, "*Who do you say that I am?*" , and Peter responds with "The Christ of God." (*"The Christ of God."* V.20b.)

When Peter uses the word Christ, it means the Messiah, the Anointed One. Generation after generation the Jews have been waiting for the Messiah to come, and Peter is saying to Jesus, "You're the One we've been waiting for." But what's interesting is that this conversation was also recorded by Matthew, and he provides a bit more detail, letting us know that Peter's full response was "You are the Christ, the Son of God."

Three years walking with talking with Jesus, Peter has come to realize that Jesus is more than what the Jews were expecting...more than Moses, more than King David...He is divine, He *is* God in the flesh. Peter gets it.

There are times when I pray, that I find myself overwhelmed with the realization that I am actually talking with Jesus...I'm talking with God Himself. And He's listening!

I'm having an actual conversation with Jesus, who put this tiny ball of a planet in this solar system which is a speck in this huge galaxy which is a speck in the part of the universe that we are aware of. Jesus, who was there when everything was made and put in place...I'm talking to Him, *and He's listening*.

Jesus is the Christ, God in the flesh, and this is not just something that Peter gets, or that you and I get...but every disciple of Jesus gets this. And it's something we don't want to miss in this passage, it's something we don't want to miss today.

Something else we don't want to miss is....

B. Jesus Teaching on The Cost of Discipleship

Now keep in mind, when Peter makes this proclamation, they haven't set out yet. And before they do, Jesus begins to teach about the cost of following Him. Because it's one thing to believe that He is the Christ, but that does not a disciple make. A disciple is one who knows who Jesus is...and decides to follow Him, fully aware of the cost.

Let's listen to Jesus as He teaches...

Luke 9:23-24 Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.

Ah, Jesus is using a paradox, which are words that seem contradictory, but end up being true. “Save your life by losing your life. Lose your life for me and you will save it.”

Jesus is saying you can keep your life just as it is...you can save it, hold onto it...and in one sense it will be easy, because that what tons of other people will be doing as well.

Probably the best way to describe the attitude of those holding onto their lives...much of it revolves around winning. What is right, what is true doesn't matter, it's all about winning. It's about getting ahead, being known, being first.

We live in a world where these quotes can be easily found: **“There is no such thing as second place. Either you're first or you're nothing.”** Or this one: **“Second place is the first loser.”**

You and I may not come up with these kinds of quotes, but it's easy to live by them, without even thinking about it. We find ourselves competing with one another; it happens within families (my kids are smarter, more athletic, more talented than your kids)...it happens in the workplace, in our schools, on social media...we will say and do things – subtle but calculated - in order to “win.”

And we can't thrive that way... there is no family, no church, no organization or community that can thrive that way. We end up working against each other, rather than for each other. And Jesus says, if that's the life you want, if this is the life you're trying to save...in the end you're going to lose.

But Jesus offers an alternative for those who are looking to follow Him. *“Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.” (Luke 9:24).*

First, know that it will cost you your way of life. It will no longer be about getting ahead, being known, being first. This is the cost of following me, Jesus says: Be humble, be

selfless, lay aside your rights...because this is how you will thrive, how your family, your church, your community will thrive.

We end up saving our lives by letting go of our way of doing life...instead following Jesus, and His way of life. Dying in order to live seems contradictory, and yet it turns out to be true.

Another thing we don't want to miss would be...

C. The Discernment of Jesus

Let's look at the three encounters where Jesus comes across as pretty blunt. First guy approaches Jesus, "I'll follow you wherever you go."

Luke 9:58 Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

And we say, "What kind of response is that?" The next guy wants to bury his father and Jesus says let someone else do it. Third guy wants to say good-bye to his family, Jesus says something about not looking back. What's going on here?

What I want to ask you to do is not get hung up on Jesus' responses. Of course we can bury our loved ones. Of course we can say good-bye to our family before we set out to minister in any way. So what is all of this about?

What we see here is that Jesus is able to discern what lies within each person's heart. The first guy declares that he will follow Jesus anywhere, and yet Jesus was able to discern something hidden behind what appears to be a noble statement.

It's likely that when Jesus looked at this man, He probably saw a home and possessions, a nice standard of living. And Jesus discerns that this could present a problem for this man.

"You say you'll follow me anywhere? This is not about glamour. I have no place to lay my head. I'm not One who is looking to win. I'm One who will lay aside my rights...to the point of being arrested and willing to die. Still with me?"

And then Jesus moves on and encounters the other two, and both of them are concerned not with their standard of living, but with their families. Nothing wrong with the first man's statement, nothing wrong with what these men say.

It's just that Jesus is able to discern their priorities and how certain things would keep each of them from becoming a disciple...unless they are acknowledged, addressed and resolved. This is part of the cost of discipleship, this is what following Jesus look like.

Finally, let's take a closer look at this extreme request from James and John, which actually leads to...

D. Jesus Revealing His Heart

Luke 9:54a “Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?”

What's this all about? Well, you may recall that in our Scripture text, before asking His disciples “*Who do you say that I am?*”, Jesus asked them this question: “*Who do the crowds say that I am?*” And the disciples responded with various things that they had heard, including speculation that Jesus was in fact the prophet Elijah come back to life.

And perhaps James and John were recalling an event that transpired at one point in Elijah's life (II Kings 1). There was an evil king named Ahab, who is looking to kill Elijah, and so he sends a captain and a group of 50 men to Elijah who was sitting up on this hill. The captain orders Elijah to come down, and Elijah says that “If I am a man of God, may fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men.” And this is exactly what happened.

Ahab sends a second group – a captain and 50 men. The captain orders Elijah to come down, Elijah says, “If I am a man of God...” and fire comes down and consumed them all.

A third group comes, a captain and 50 men, and the captain fell on knees before Elijah and begged him to come with Him to appear before Ahab. And so Elijah did.

What we see here is a vivid example of how time and time again in the Bible, fire is often symbolic of God's judgment. And for James and John, here are these Samaritans who

are refusing to welcome Jesus, the Christ Himself and by doing so, are inviting and deserving of God's judgment. And yet Jesus, instead of calling down fire, rebukes James and John...and continues on His way...to Jerusalem...to the Cross.

What's interesting is that just 3 chapters later, in Luke 12, Jesus shares this – His heart - with His disciples:

Luke 12:49-50 “I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed.”

This is very interesting. Jesus is saying that He's come to bring fire on the earth, and yet He refused to do so when He was recently rejected. What's going on?

What Jesus is talking about here is not the fire of judgment coming down on others, but coming down on Him. He knows that lies ahead in Jerusalem. *“How I wish that it would soon be over with...but there is a baptism to undergo”* He's already been baptized, He's referring to His crucifixion where He will be immersed in the judgment of God. *“And how distressed I am until it is over.”*

No fire of judgment will be coming down on the Samaritans, because it will soon be coming down on Him. No fire of judgment need come down on you...on me...because it all came down on Him.

And here is where it all circles back to Peter and to all of His disciples...to all who get who Jesus is and what He is about.

Once we get what Jesus has done for us, the love that He has for each one of us...in spite of our pride, envy, gluttony, lust, unforgiveness...He's taken the fire so that you and I don't have to. We look at Jesus – the Christ, the Teacher, the example of the best way of living life and we say, “This is who I want to follow.”

So, in light of all of this, what's...

1. THE NEXT STEP

...that Jesus is asking you to take?

It's possible that we have some in here and some watching on the live stream that have yet to take that very first step, and that is in making **an initial commitment to Jesus**. It would be great if I could come up with just the right words that would help someone take that first step...but I think that in the end, it's not so much words we say but what we personally experience that may carry the most weight with those who just aren't sure about taking this first step.

My personal experience is that because of my decision to follow Jesus, I'm better at life. Pastor Andy Stanley said something along those lines about his experience, and I said, "Yes, that's a good way to put it." Because I follow Jesus, I'm a better husband, a better dad, a better friend than I was when I was holding on to my old self, my broken self.

By following Jesus, I'm better at life, and I think that everyone in here who is following Jesus would say the very same thing.

And so I encourage you to take that step. But as we've seen this morning, make sure you're aware of the cost. Walking away from the way you've always lived (for yourself).....and walking with Jesus (for Jesus, and for others). If you're willing, you'll be surprised at how good that feels.

Now some of you – many of you – have taken that first step and made that initial commitment to Jesus, and so your next step might have more to do with your daily commitment to Jesus. And one aspect of our ongoing commitment is **inviting Jesus to help us get our priorities right**.

Because Jesus knows exactly where each of our priorities lie, if we are truly wanting to follow Him, we should be inviting Him to reveal to us what we might want to overlook, and address what we might not want to address. It's part of the cost of discipleship.

And here's the thing...if it is something that is sinful and clearly out of bounds, Jesus wants you to know you can come to Him because He is willing to show you the steps you need to take in order to overcome what has a hold of you. And if you're not sure how to hear His

voice, see myself or any of the pastors and we will do our best to hear from Jesus and then share with you the steps He is asking you to take.

Having said that, I'm afraid that one reason that we don't invite Jesus to examine and reveal our priorities is because we're afraid that He's wants us to give up certain things that we really enjoy...and I don't think that's the case at all.

There are so many things in life that we enjoy and He *wants* us to enjoy...but He wants us to enjoy those things *with* Him.

Jesus breathes so much life into the things we do, and so whether it's spending time with my family, working in my garden, watching or playing sports, riding the waves at the beach...when Jesus is given priority, talking with me, teaching me, challenging me, encouraging me...I experience just an overwhelming sense of gratitude for these more enjoyable aspects of my life.

There have been many nights where I have worked hard in my garden, the sweat pouring off of me, muscles tired, the sun has set and the light of day is fading away...and I will find myself overflowing with gratitude for the evening He has allowed me to experience... with Him by my side.

When I'm out in the water at the beach, I'll be carrying on a conversation with Him out loud, letting Him know how thankful and appreciative I am that He allows me to experience something that I find so enjoyable...with Him by my side. Or maybe walking on the water.

Hobbies, vacations, family, sports...we can allow anything we enjoy to take priority over Him. But we can keep this from happening by making sure He is involved in every aspect of our lives, and more than that, we look to Him to help us live our lives in ways that are consistent with all of His teaching.

So here's what I'm asking you do to...walk out of here this morning with the word "Priorities" etched in your brain. Just one word, Priorities. Then today and throughout this week give some thought to those things that take priority in your life. With each of them ask and answer this question:

Does this hinder my walk with Jesus, and if so, how?

This is the cost of discipleship, this is what it looks like to follow Jesus. Allow Him to reveal to you – as He revealed to those 3 men – anything that you need recognize, address and resolve. The cost may mean walking away completely...or maybe not. Maybe all He wants is for you to invite Him in and let Him talk to you, teach you, challenge and encourage you.

And after working through that question, with those same priorities in mind, ask and answer this question:

In what way does Jesus *enhance* this part of my life?

Are you looking to Jesus to take what are the most enjoyable aspects of your life, and make them better? He just breathes life into the things that we do, and so this week, invite Him in, so that He can do just that. Invite Him in, let Him lead, live in a way that is consistent with all of His teaching...and you will experience a strong sense of gratitude for the ways you have been blessed.

Okay, we're on the road, we're on our way. Next week we'll stop at some other point along the road and listen as Jesus continues to teach us what it looks like to follow Him.

PRAYER