

During a children's message, a pastor was asking the children questions, which is always dangerous. “Will your parents let you do this? Why would your parents say no to that?” He wanted the kids to realize that parents demand some things and say no to other things out of love. Then the pastor asked, “Why would your parents not just buy you whatever you want, whenever you want it?” A four-year-old very quickly replied, “Because they can’t afford it.” Cost is crucial isn't it?

As we learn from today's gospel, it's all about cost, even life with God. The question is, are you willing to afford it?

In verses 57 thru 62, Luke tells us that Jesus made three distinct challenges to those who were considering being his followers. The first is in response to the man who said, “I will follow you wherever you go.” We don't exactly know why the man made that declaration, but we can gather from Jesus' response that the man was looking for some type of gain. Jesus' response indicates that material security cannot be the highest priority of a follower's life.

Someone then says, “Let me go and bury my father.” Commentators don't agree on whether the father's death was imminent or not. But the point is the same either way. Following Jesus must come first, not simply when everything is convenient and will work out with a minimum of distraction. Our following Jesus cannot take second place to anything. It's the priority.

The third instance is like the second in its request, but Jesus' reply provokes different thoughts. “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the Kingdom of God.” What does this mean? Now, you may or may not be experienced at plowing but most of us have tried to mow a lawn. Have you ever tried to mow a straight line but then you look over your shoulder? What happened then? Chances are, you pulled in the direction that you were looking and your line was no longer straight. I believe that's the biggest takeaway point from this passage today. The point Jesus is driving at is that faith and following looks forward not back.

I have stood in churches where the focus is on the glory days that are now in the distant past. I've listened as people spoke wistfully about the days when the pews were full. Remember when people were ready to make a commitment, not like today when people are so busy? Remember when? Remember when? And make no mistake, it's human nature to do this. This is the basis for all nostalgia. But nostalgia can go too far when we are convinced that the “good ole days” were so good that there is nothing good to look forward to.

What Jesus is strongly suggesting is that the nature of faith is to be forward focused, even as it is rooted in events that took place in the past. Here's what I mean: if we remember the mission that Jesus has given his church; the mission of making disciples baptizing and teaching in his name, we're going to be moving forward, and moving out, bringing Jesus to people. We won't pine for the good old days because we'll be occupied with extending the kingdom today! Oh, we'll look back with thankfulness, but our eyes will be fully opened to what God is doing today, and our imagination will be captured by the future God has prepared for us! To truly do ministry means

stepping outside of comfort; convenience; and routine. The disciples in today's passage misunderstood ministry. They misunderstood the cost of discipleship. How do we know? They encountered people who didn't welcome Jesus and immediately wanted to destroy them. That's not how the business of gospel ministry is conducted. It is conducted in humility towards people struggling with sin problems. It is conducted with hopefulness that God is making things better; indeed, He is making all things new!

In this gospel reading today, we meet the provocative Jesus. We meet the challenging Jesus, and again, the challenge is this: will you commit to following him, especially when it isn't easy? Or will we say to Jesus: this is the way I like it, this is the way it is always been, therefore this is the way it should always be?

Why let ourselves be challenged, why inconvenience ourselves make a commitment of energy, time, and resources? Why not get as much as possible with his little cost as necessary?

Well, let me ask you: what if Jesus had done that? Didn't he pay the ultimate cost for us? It was Jesus who made the commitment to give his life. He did so willingly. He took no shortcuts but did everything necessary to pay the cost of salvation for us. He did not consider equality with God something to cling to. He did not look back as he was plowing. His devotion to you led him straight to the cross. This what you and I are called to respond to.

Jesus didn't play it safe. He knew his goal. He knew why he had come. It was to seek and save the lost. He moved forward. Will you follow Him?