

Luke 9:51-62  
6/26/16

Psalm 77:1, 11-14  
Pentecost 6C

## The Choice

After worship one Sunday, a young boy suddenly announces to his mother, “Mom, I’ve decided I’m going to be a minister when I grow up.”

“That’s fine with us,” his mother says. “But what made you decide to be a minister?”

“Well,” the boy replies, “I’ll be going to church on Sundays anyway, and I figure it will be more fun to stand up and yell than to sit still and listen.”

Young people and not-so-young people choose ministry for lots of different reasons. Ministers are not only those who stand up in pulpits. You are a minister if you are a baptized Christian! And the One whose name you bear invites you today to follow him on a journey.

This Sunday we hear that Jesus is setting out on a journey. In Luke’s Gospel, this is a significant turning point. A pivotal turning point. Ever since the first days of his ministry, Jesus has been preaching. Teaching. And healing—in the region of

Galilee. On green hillsides. And beside the sparkling blue waters of the lake.

But now it's time to leave. *The days [draw] near* for him to complete his mission and fulfill his work. Jesus knows where he has to go. And he knows what awaits him there.

Surely, he's tempted not to go. He's been tempted before. But for Jesus, temptation doesn't end in the wilderness. This One who is fully human faces no greater temptation than to take another road. But he doesn't. He gathers his courage. He steels himself. He makes a choice. And he sets off down the road.

Harry Emerson Fosdick observes that "He who chooses the beginning of a road chooses the place it leads to." For Jesus, this road leads to suffering and rejection, rejection that begins even as he—a Jew—travels through Samaria.

The most direct route from Galilee to Jerusalem winds through Samaria. Now in Jesus' day, traveling Jews usually go out of their way to avoid Samaria, preferring instead to take the long way *around* it. For hundreds of years, there's been animosity between Samaritans and Jews. Actually, they've been enemies. Samaritans don't normally extend hospitality to Jews. And when they refuse to extend hospitality to Jesus, his

disciples want to know: *Can't we ask God to get 'em for that? You know, zap 'em with a bolt of lightning? Lord, let's get even!*

But Jesus says "No way!" He's not interested in retribution. Not now. Not ever. His face is set toward Jerusalem. Jesus has chosen to walk a way that leads to a cross.

As the psalmist sings, the Lord's way is holy. But it's not an easy road. On this road, Jesus meets some disciple wanna-bes. And he uses these encounters to teach that discipleship has a cost. That following him means deciding to walk behind him on a road that leads in a direction diametrically different from the road we've been walking.

Shortly after leaving those unwelcoming Samaritans, Jesus meets disciple applicant number one. And he tells this person: *You know, even the creatures have homes, but "the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." So think it over carefully, Jesus cautions, before you sign up to be my disciple. Because following me can mean giving up a life of ease and comfort.*

Comfort. I'm remembering a time when our son Robbie was just a boy. Bob decided to take him camping one weekend at a state park. The two of them looked forward to enjoying meals cooked over an open fire and sleeping in a tent under the

stars. My dear spouse did ask if I would like to go along. But I declined, responding, “Thanks, but no thanks—you and Robbie go right ahead. Share some quality father and son time together. Engage in some male bonding. Have a great time!”

Now that weekend didn’t turn out quite the way the guys had envisioned it. Bob can tell you all about it.

I wasn’t there. I stayed home with Alison. And we engaged in some bonding of our own—which, if memory serves, involved several Blockbuster movies and plenty of popcorn. However, I have to confess that I had ulterior motives for skipping that camping trip. I would have sorely missed bed, shower, kitchen, and air-conditioning. All the comforts of home!

Deciding to follow Jesus can mean giving up comforts we’ve come to take for granted. Each summer, hundreds of youth and adults across our state offer themselves and their time to a mission known as Salkehatchie. Spending their nights in sleeping bags on hard church floors. Spending their days in sweltering South Carolina heat and humidity. Repairing and rebuilding the homes of those whose need is great.

The truth is that following Jesus can take us down a difficult and narrow path. A path on which we sometimes feel

conflicted. Most of us take family responsibilities seriously—especially those associated with care at the end of life. People in Jesus' day, too, took family responsibilities seriously. The important duty of caring for one's parents as they aged and, when the time came, burying them, was binding on devout first-century Jews.

So when Jesus calls a man who then asks for time to go and bury his father, we understand what he *really* means. This would-be disciple is probably saying that he needs to put off following Jesus for a period of several *years*. While he cares for his father for the rest of his father's life.

And what does Jesus tell this man? *Let somebody who isn't following me take care of that. You go and proclaim the kingdom of God. Now!*

Does Jesus' reply sound harsh? What do you think? Do you think Jesus wants you and me to stop keeping the commandment to honor our parents? Do you think Jesus wants you and me to stop loving our families?

A relative of mine used to tell me emphatically, and on a regular basis, that devotion to family should take precedence over our commitment to the faith and to the church.

But today we hear Jesus disagree. His time is short. Each step takes him closer to suffering and death. His message is urgent. It can't be put off until a more convenient time that may or may not come. His good news of God's coming reign has to be spread. And if disciples don't spread it, who will?

But when a third disciple candidate wants to say good-bye to his family, Jesus insists that there's no time for looking back. He illustrates with an image well-known to people of his day and well-known to people throughout most of Christian history. The image of a plow. Now today, on most farms, the tractor has replaced the plow. Have you ever stood behind a plow? I never have. But it's my understanding that if you're plowing and you look back, you won't be able to plow a furrow that's straight and true. You have to keep your eyes focused on what's in front of you. You have to look at where you're going.

And keep plowing ahead, just like the One who did not look back at the security and safety of his home in Galilee. He didn't look back at the intimate circle of his mother and brothers and sisters. No. Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem. Jesus made the choice.

And today he calls you and me to do the same.

Make the choice not to ask: *What can Christ do for me?*

Make the choice to ask: *What can I do for Christ?*

What we can do for our Lord is to make the conscious choice—the intentional choice—to place him first in our lives. Wiley Cooper puts it this way: “Jesus demanded that allegiance to his gospel of holy love for every child of God come before birth family, tradition, country, political party—anything else.”

If our loves are rightly ordered, love for Christ and loyalty to Christ exceed any and all other loves and loyalties. For the way of discipleship is radically demanding. The One we follow charges you and me with continuing to make choices that reveal the one priority of our lives.

Make the choice not to cling tightly to what’s comfortable and what’s familiar. Make the choice to let *go* of the past. Make the choice to say *yes* to Jesus’ summons to travel with him into uncharted territory.

Make the choice not to look back at the past. Make the choice to look forward—to *lean* forward into new life, new life in Christ, new life that begins today and has no end.

Make the choice *not* to buy into the world’s values of vengeance and retaliation. Make the choice to walk in the way

of the Prince of Peace who has come not to destroy enemies but to break the vicious cycle of violence by laying down his life. By forgiving.

Make the choice. That's what we hear the voice of Jesus saying to us today. But other voices compete for our attention. Other voices attempt to pull us in myriad directions. We strive for balance. David Wade offers personal insight into our hectic lives:

“Jesus says, ‘Follow me!’ I say, ‘OK, but I have a few things to do first.’ My calendar is always full. I have so many responsibilities. Home. Family. Work. Play. And they are all important. I’ve made promises and, of course, I must keep them! But do I prioritize? Do I honor them in order of importance? Do I choose wisely? Or do I try to do everything, and miss what’s really important because I have no more time?

Jesus says, ‘The kingdom comes first!’ I agree, Wade continues, but it’s usually *my* kingdom, not his! Lord, forgive me for my busy-ness, which so often interferes with *your* business. And teach me to hear your call, and to follow...Now.”

Beloved, will you make the choice to follow Jesus out of Galilee? Will you make the choice to follow him wherever he



goes? Will you make the choice to follow him all the way to a hill outside Jerusalem?

You'll never make a more critical choice. You'll never make a more challenging choice. You'll never make a more life-changing choice. I invite you today to make this choice. I invite you today to reaffirm your commitment to follow the One who made the choice for you.

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.