

**Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2022**  
**Glynde Lutheran Church**  
**Sermon on Luke 9:57 – 62**  
**Theme: “Are you a Christian?”**  
**“Being a Christian also means *following* Jesus”**

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***Introduction:***

Our theme for this morning is the question, “Are you a Christian?” Well, “Are you!?” I’ve asked this question of many people in my role as a pastor of a church. And I get all sorts of answers, when I ask this question. For example, when I ask people, *who I am visiting with the intention of stimulating them to consider their relationship with God*, this question, “Are you a Christian?” I get answers like:

- \* **“Yes, I’m a Methodist” *which tells me quite a lot, because the Methodist church ceased to exist in about 1977 or so.***
- \* **“Yes, I believe” *in God***
- \* **“Yes, I am, but I don’t go to church”**

Interestingly, none of these answers mention Jesus....

Can I ask you the same question? “Are you a Christian?” What answer would *you* give?

I’ll give you a few moments to think about an answer, and then I’ll ask you what your answer is.... No, I won’t. Just kidding! I won’t do that, because I wouldn’t want to embarrass anyone.

But think about how you would answer this question.... What sort of answers do I think that I would get from you if I asked you? Maybe some of you would say things like:

- \* **“Yes, I am. *I trust in Jesus as my Saviour!*”**
- \* **“Yes, I am. *I was baptised into God’s family, and Jesus is my Saviour*”**
- \* **“Yes, I am. *I am part of God’s family, and I love Jesus*”**

Well, they are all good answers.... *But they all don’t mention one very important aspect of what a Christian is: someone who values loyalty and commitment to Jesus above everything else....*

We who are Lutherans, we who are Christians and members of Lutheran communities, often forget this. I remember growing up thinking that being a Christian was synonymous with *just* believing in Jesus as my Saviour. If I could say the words, "I believe that Jesus died on the cross for me", then that was good enough. That made me a Christian, and as long as I could mouth these words, then I was right for eternity, *and I could live my life now doing whatever I wanted to do....*

But when I started really reading and thinking about the words of Jesus in the Gospels, *and that was probably only when I started going to Seminary would you believe*, I started learning that being a Christian involves more than just being able to utter the right words about Jesus being my Saviour, and *more even* than trusting in Jesus as my Saviour.

Being a Christian involves also *following Jesus* in the way that I live my life. It involves listening to him and obeying what he has to say, *rather than listening to what my family says is right, or what my friends say is right, or what my society or my government says is right.*

Have a listen to some of the things that Jesus has to say *in our Bible reading* about what being a Christian, being a follower of his, involves...

- 1) A man comes up to Jesus and says to him, "I want to be a Christian!". Well, no, he doesn't say that, but what he says is the same as saying that....

*The term "Christian" was first used, Luke tells us in the book of Acts, in Antioch in the very early days of the Christian church (Acts 11:26; cf. 9:2, 22:4). The man says to Jesus, "I will follow you wherever you go!".*

In answer to him, Jesus points out to him the cost of discipleship, the cost of following him.

Following me, Jesus says to the man, involves hardship, insecurity, and homelessness. Jesus answers with a response of three lines; *actually, all these responses here are in three lines.* Jesus says to the man:

**"Foxes have holes,  
and birds of the air have nests,  
but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head" (Lk 9:58)**

And still today it is true that following Jesus, being a Christian, doesn't give us an easy, cozy life, *if we take seriously what being a follower of Jesus involves*. It involves loving others when you don't feel like it; it involves giving of yourself for others no matter what it costs you so far as time or energy or money is concerned; it involves talking about Jesus to your friends and others, and taking the risk that they may no longer want to be your friend, or worse still may drop you as a friend and 'slag' off at you for being a Christian.

- 2) The second man isn't a volunteer. He doesn't volunteer to be a Christian. Jesus calls him to be a Christian. Jesus says to him, "Follow me!"

Remember what Matthew did when Jesus said these words to him. He "got up, and followed Jesus" (*Matt. 9:9*). I love the way that this is portrayed in YouTube series *The Chosen* which has recently come out. Matthew has seen Jesus heal a paralysed man and he's heard what Jesus had to say to the crowds, and he's sitting at his tax-collector's booth, when Jesus comes up and turns to him and says, "Follow me!". And Matthew gets up and follows Jesus (*cf. Matthew, The Video Bible*).

But the man in our Bible reading doesn't respond that way to Jesus' call. Rather, he responds by saying to Jesus, "I'll come with you sometime, but not right now". Well, his exact words were: "Sir, first let me go back and bury my father".

When we hear this answer with Western ears, *ears informed by our Western culture*, we think that the man's dad has just died, and what the man is saying is that he wants just a little bit of time to go and bury his dad, *which seems to be a perfectly reasonable request*.

But in the Middle-East, "Let me go and bury my father" is shorthand for saying, "Let me go and serve my father while he is still alive, and after he dies I'll bury him and then I'll be free to do whatever". The man is saying to Jesus, "I'll come with you, but not right now".

There are many people like this in our society, and *maybe at times we even fall into this category*. We put off *really* following Jesus, and we

rationalise that we can do this because we have our eternal insurance policy in our pocket: we have been baptised, and we can say the words, “Jesus is my Saviour”.

What does Jesus reply to this man, and what does Jesus say to us if we fit into this category.

Jesus says:

**“Let the dead bury their own dead  
*this is, let the spiritually dead bury their own dead,*  
But you go  
and proclaim the kingdom of God” (Lk 9:60).**

- 3) The third man, like the first, is a volunteer, but he’s a volunteer with a condition. He says to Jesus, “I will follow you, sir, but first let me go and say ‘good-bye’ to those at home”. Sounds like a perfectly reasonable condition to put to Jesus: “I will follow you, but first let me go and say ‘good-bye’ to my family”.

But again we are hearing this with Western ears, *with a mind full of Western concepts rather than with Middle-Eastern concepts*. The word which we translate as “to say ‘Good-bye’” is better translated as “to take leave of” (*Bailey, Through Peasant Eyes, p. 26-27*). This translation changes completely the condition that the man is making. He is actually saying to Jesus, “I will follow, but first *let me take leave of those at home*”.

This procedure of *taking leave of your elders at home* is a formality which is still practised even today in the Middle-East. Before a son leaves home to go away and do anything, he asks permission of his father before he goes. For example, an engineer in his forties will still go to his dad to ask person to go off to work elsewhere on a project. He will take his leave of his father and say to him, “I go *with your permission*”. And the father will reply, “May you go in safety. May you go in peace. God bless you” (*Bailey, 29; H. Wendt, The Parables of Jesus, 4-5*).

But, of course, this in all probability is not going to happen here. For the third man’s condition for following Jesus is really an excuse for not following him.

For he knows full well, *and everybody listening knows full well*, that

there is probably no way that the man's father will let his son wonder off on such a questionable enterprise (*Bailey, 28*).

Jesus says to this third man:

**“No one who puts his hand to the plough  
and then looks back  
is of any use in the kingdom of God”** (*Lk 9:62*).

In those days, you ploughed a field using a plough attached to an ox. You held onto the plough with your left hand, held a whip in your right hand, and you ploughed with your eyes firmly fixed on the hindquarters of the ox and the furrow that the plough was making. If you turned around and were looking backwards, then the plough would go in all directions and muck everything up.

Jesus is using this mental picture to make a major point to the third man, *and to us who are hearing this today*. Jesus is saying that following him means not looking back, but rather keeping your eye firmly on where he wants to take you (*Bailey, 29-30*). To be a Christian is to be a follower of Jesus, and to go where Jesus wants to take you. Following Jesus involves focusing on him, and not on all the attractions of the circus around you.

Well, where does all this leave us? It leaves each of us, I reckon, thinking about our personal relationship with Jesus, *and what being a Christian means for our life....*

I've been focusing on these words of Jesus to 'would be followers of him' *to get each of us to think about our relationship with Jesus:*

- \* “Are you trusting in Jesus as your Saviour? You know, the wonderful thing is that even if you and I are *only just* clinging to Jesus as our Saviour, we are each God's dear forgiven child (*TDD, 22F, cf. Rom. 3:21-28; 5:1; 8:1*).
  
- \* “Are you a disciple of Jesus? The word “disciple” means “learner”, *someone who is hanging on to every word that Jesus says in order to learn from him*. Remember what Mary did when Jesus visited the home of Martha and Mary: she “sat down at the feet of the Lord, and listened to his teaching”, and Jesus commended her for doing that (*Luke 10:38-42*).

Are you doing that? Are you sitting at the feet of Jesus, *so to speak*, and learning from him, as you read the Gospels and the New Testament as a whole.

- \* “Are you following Jesus, and living your life as he wants you to live your life?” “Are you travelling with Jesus in your life, and hanging on to every word that he says?” I’ve been rewatching *The Chosen* during my holiday break, and the thing that strikes me above everything else in this series is that the disciples leave everything to follow Jesus, *believing that in doing so they are doing what God wants them to do....*

So how are you going to live your life in this new year of your life? My prayer is that each of us live out our life trusting in Jesus as our Saviour, listening to him, and following him wherever he takes us.

And where will this take us? What priorities do you believe Jesus wants you to have in this new year, year 2022? Where do you think that Jesus is leading you to? What things come to your mind? Maybe, it involves some of the following areas:

- \* **Spending time with Jesus**
- \* **Being like Jesus**
- \* **Loving and forgiving others: family, friends etc**
- \* **Being more willing to share the good news of Jesus.**
- \* **A willingness to give of your time and your energy to those who need your help**
- \* **Generosity to those in need**

### ***Conclusion:***

I love the song “Day by day” in the musical *Godspell*. Well, the song is really a prayer that is sung. I often go around singing it. It goes like this:

**Day by day  
Day by day  
Oh, dear Lord, three things I pray:  
To see thee more clearly,  
Love thee more dearly,  
Follow thee more nearly,  
Day by day....**

May this be your prayer and my prayer as we live out our life in this new year following Jesus.

***Addendum:***

In his book *Through Peasant Eyes*, Ken Bailey has this to say about the second dialogue “First let me go and bury my father”:

**Again the assumption governing the idiomatic language is that the son has the duty to remain at home until the death of his parents. Then, and only then, can he consider other options.**

**Here we are dealing with community expectations, which can be roughly translated into Western terms as peer pressures.**

**The recruit on the side of the road is saying, “My community makes certain demands on me and the pull of these demands is very strong. Surely you do not expect me to violate the expectations of my community?”**

**Yet this is precisely what Jesus requires. The proclaiming of the kingdom of God can only mean announcing the kingdom of God as a present reality. Jesus says the spiritually dead can take care of the traditional responsibilities of your local community, but as for *you*, go and proclaim the arrival of the kingdom (p. 26-27).**