

Wanted: Focused Followers of Jesus

Luke 9:51-62

June 29, 2025 (Pen. 3-C)

St. Paul's Lutheran, North Freedom

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 heading for 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." (Luke 9:51-62 NIV84)

Dear followers of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior:

"Help wanted" reads the sign at a certain business. You go in and ask for details. The manager gives a list of what they're looking for: A hard worker, one who is willing to work long hours and be on call 24-7; a person who loves their family, but puts his work first; compensation doesn't include a salary or an hourly wage, but trust that the master will provide all your needs and that there will be a beautiful reward at the end of your service.

Would you take that position? The Lord Jesus is really asking that of us when he calls us to be his disciples, or followers. As we look today at his dealings with two disciples and three would-be followers, let's learn why we'll accept Jesus' call to us, when he says, **"Wanted: Focused Followers of Jesus."**

Jesus wants his followers to be focused on his mission. In the first verse of our text, we find him focused on his mission: *"As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem."* Jesus knew he only had a few months left before his mission to save the world would be complete. So he started making his way to Jerusalem, the place where he would be captured by his enemies and condemned to death. Outside the city walls he would be crucified, dead and buried, and then on the third day rise again. Then forty days later he would be taken up to heaven, having completed his mission to save the world.

There were still villages to stop at to bring the message of salvation. Sadly, one Samaritan village did not welcome him. They rejected him "because he was heading for Jerusalem." They didn't accept his mission that this needed to be done in Jerusalem; as Samaritans, they were suspicious of Jews and objected to worship at Jerusalem. So they rejected Jesus. It's with sadness that we note how many people today reject the mission of Christ, by thinking that we can be our own Savior, or that Jesus only saved a few people but other religions have their own way to God.

It can fill us with dismay and even anger to see people reject Jesus. That's why two of Jesus' disciples, James and John, asked, *"Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?"* They were thinking of the time the prophet Elijah called down fire from heaven to

destroy soldiers who came from wicked King Ahaziah of Israel (cf. 2 Kings 1:10-12). That was a righteous judgment; those soldiers were hardened in their sin.

But Jesus rebuked the two disciples for misunderstanding his mission and what it meant to be a focused follower of Jesus. Yes, zeal is needed, as well as a proper understanding of the law. We would say today that those churches who reject Bible teachings like hell, who disregard the law and fail to call sin a sin, will face God's judgment. But being focused followers of Jesus does not mean we should call for God's judgment on them right away. Jesus spoke about his mission this way: "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:17). As followers of Jesus, let's also focus on his mission, and the mission he has given us. When some reject the Word, let's be patient with them, persistent in bringing the gospel message to them so that the Lord can change their hearts, and pray that God extend their time of grace so that they can have a change of heart and believe. Leave the judging to God!

Jesus and the disciples moved on from the town. They came across three men as prospect followers of Jesus. The first appeared to be very focused and even "on fire for the Lord." The eager-beaver prospect promised, "I will follow you wherever you go." But Jesus seemed to pour cold water on his enthusiasm. *"Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."* In other words, following Jesus will come at a cost. It may mean not only foregoing luxuries, but enduring hardship and pain. Followers of Jesus need to count the cost of discipleship. Are we willing to follow Jesus, and follow him first, ahead of clinging to creature comforts and the treasures and pleasures of this life?

The second and third prospects came at different times, but let's take them together. When Jesus called on them, "Follow me!", they seemed willing but they both had family responsibilities. *"Lord, first let me go and bury my father."* *"First let me go back and say good-bye to my family."* Sounds like reasonable requests. But note the word "first." Both of them were putting family ahead of following Jesus. Neither of them were really focused followers, for they did not put Jesus first, as Jesus put it another time: "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:37). Focused followers of Jesus follow Jesus first!

Don't misunderstand. All throughout the Bible we are told to love and honor family members: "Husbands, love your wives...Children, obey your parents...Fathers, bring up children in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 5:25; 6:1,4). In fact, loving family members is part of our various callings in the positions God has placed us in. But remember our focus is still on Jesus. *"You go and proclaim the kingdom of God"* needs to be our priority. And if we're constantly looking back at family instead of focused on our mission, Jesus warns, *"No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."* Farmers, you know if you're on your tractor and looking backwards all the time, you're not going to plow straight furrows and the crops will be a mess. Focus ahead! Focus on Jesus—first before family and all things!

Focused followers of Jesus will focus on what Jesus was focused on: "Being taken up to heaven." Because Jesus was focused on his destination, we know how we'll get there. We get there only through Jesus, who lived the narrow way, who died as the substitute for sinners, who rose again and ascended to heaven—for you and me. Jesus is the only way. That's why we follow Jesus. He's focused on us and cares for us and forgives us and loves us. The work he gives us is hard, but the benefits are fantastic: Eternal life in heaven! And Jesus earned it all for us! Amen.