

Coop's Scoops #63, Sunday Liturgy and Sermon, June 28, 2020

Our Readings:

1 Kings 19: 15-21

Psalm 44: 1-8

Galatians 5: 1, 13-25

The Collect:

Almighty God, you have taught us through your Son that love fulfils the law. May we love you with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, and all our strength, and may we love our neighbour as ourselves; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

The Holy Gospel: Luke 9: 51-62

A Samaritan Village Refuses to Receive Jesus

⁵¹ When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. ⁵² And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; ⁵³ but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. ⁵⁴ When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" ⁵⁵ But he turned and rebuked them. ⁵⁶ Then they went on to another village.

Would-Be Followers of Jesus

⁵⁷ As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." ⁵⁸ And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." ⁵⁹ To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." ⁶⁰ But Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." ⁶¹ Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." ⁶² Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God".

Sermon: The disciples walking with Jesus into Samaria believed that, like Elijah, God would be pleased if they destroyed their enemies. Jesus rebuked them and lets them know that things have changed. He is offering friendship to exiles and

enemies and hoping to include them in His Kingdom. How? By changing them, just as He had already changed the lives of His disciples through His love.

Centuries later and far away, Abraham Lincoln was once rebuked by an important political ally over, of all things, being too polite to his opponents. Lincoln was reminded that it was his duty as President to destroy his enemies. And Lincoln said “Do I not destroy my enemy when I make him my friend?” Inclusion promotes transformation.

In our Gospel this morning, we meet three men who may be joining the family of disciples. And they, and we, learn very quickly that being a disciple of Jesus is not going to be easy or convenient. Jesus speaks some hard words. I feel a little uneasy every time I read them. But hard as they are they cannot and must not be glossed over, minimized or dismissed. But they must be understood in the way that Jesus meant them and the way the listeners heard them at that time and in that place. Culture and context really matter.

To the first candidate, Jesus words about foxes and holes and birds and nests would have been absolutely clear. To us, not so much. But if I say “Eagle” and ask you what country that represents, most will say the USA. “Bear” would mean Russia. “Dragon” would mean China. And “Beaver” would mean Canada. In Jesus time, “the birds of the air” meant gentiles, including the occupying Romans. Foxes were “Ammonites”, also gentiles but noted for idolatry and adultery. Jesus is not telling this first candidate only that he will be homeless and poor. Jesus is telling him that he will not have the power of the occupying Romans or the pleasures of the sexually perverse Ammonites, he will be joining the official opposition instead. Jesus is saying, in effect, “In this oppressed country, where people rarely speak out and cannot oppose the ones in power, do you really want to join the opposition and be exposed to danger?” Much harder than simply not having a nest! Much harder words than we might have thought.

And then there’s the man who wants to bury his father. Sounds reasonable. But then, here’s the culture again. You see, this man’s father is not actually dead. If he was, the son would be sitting Shiva, not out in the afternoon sun hobnobbing

with a wandering rabbi. His father probably isn't even sick. The son is stating that he has the traditional rabbinical duty to stay at home until his parents are respectfully buried. That could be years, if not decades away. "I'll follow you years down the road" is what he means, but not what Jesus requires. Jesus is saying "Now, today, make up your mind, this decision is urgent."

In the third situation, the man just wants to go home and say goodbye. Just being a good son, right? Well, it's culture again. Saying goodbye to a Jewish family really meant asking permission to leave. A son would say "I am leaving now" and a father, if in agreement, would say "God go with you". And everyone present on that day so long ago knew that no Jewish father in his right mind would give permission to his son to go off on a crazy scheme like following Jesus. No future in that! If this third man wants to follow Jesus, he can't count on approval from his family any more than a man can count on ploughing a straight furrow if he's looking over his shoulder.

It's both interesting and frustrating to me that we are not told the outcomes of these discussions. We don't know if the men joined in or not. It seems to be more important to focus on the truth that Jesus was teaching than on the specific men. Jesus had set His face to go to Jerusalem. He expects His disciples to set their faces to their task just as He did. To be a disciple will require that God's Kingdom be your absolute priority, will require utter persistence and dogged determination, and will estrange you from the power and the riches offered by the Kingdoms of this world. Jesus doesn't dangle any carrots to attract us. He just gives us the honest truth. The only reason to become a disciple is because we believe that Jesus is indeed the Way, the Truth and the Life, the Son of God in human flesh and we don't want to do without Him. Otherwise, 'tis better to eat, drink and be merry. Tough stuff indeed. Who then can be fit for the Kingdom. Or as the disciples once asked "Who then can be saved?" And the answer is still as always "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible".

Such good news! Discipleship is indeed about poverty and persistence and priority on our part. And it is also all about grace on God's part. No one among

us has always be fully convinced, no on has always placed God above everything else and no one has never wavered. No one. But God knows the intent of our hearts and the setting of our minds, and somehow declares we are “fit” for the Kingdom when we long for Him and do our best.

Grace is never earned. Put a “why?” Before that last word and you’ll get “y”earned. We do not “earn” our way into the Kingdom. We “yearn” our way in...by longing to know and honour God. God’s grace is infinite, and we receive His grace by deciding to accept it because we want it. We yearn for it. That is our part. And even that is begun in us by the Holy Spirit. It is indeed all God’s work, yet we can reject it. Or embrace it. Grace is poured on our holy longings rather than any merit of our achievings. “For where your heart is, there will your treasure be also.”

We can never earn our way into the heart of God

We are already there

But we can yearn our way into knowing His love.

We can never find joy in responding to “musts” and “shoulds”

Such rules imprison us.

But we can yearn to make our “coulds” into “woulds”

Follow Me is not so much an order as an invitation

And we are all invited

The question is simply do we want to?

Do we yearn to?

-Judie+

Prayers:

Lord make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where

there is sadness, joy. Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

Blessing:

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look upon you with favour and grant you peace. Amen.

Closing Hymn (just say it, or sing your heart out!)

Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown? Will you let my name be known,
will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?

Will you leave yourself behind if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer in you and you in me?

Will you let the blinded see if I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoners free and never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean and do such as this unseen,
and admit to what I mean in you and you in me?

Will you love the "you" you hide if I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside and never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found to reshape the world around,
through my sight and touch and sound in you and you in me?

Lord your summons echoes true when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you and never be the same.
In Your company I'll go where Your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow in you and you in me.

John L. Bell & Graham Maule

