

Sermon: 6th Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Luke 9:51-62

Theme: How is our relationship to Christ?

Goal: To examine how we react to the challenges of a Christian life.

Does Jesus always have priority?

Dear Friends,

Introduction: The Christian life is a continuous go-forward life style. We cannot stop, we cannot go back. It's a lifelong commitment. It is called 'discipleship': to follow Jesus step by step, even through the cross, until we reach the goal of our faith: the life in heaven, where Jesus is seated at the right hand of God the Father, preparing room for us. Sometimes it seems easy to be a Christian; but sometimes it's not that easy, as our text shows us. It is not allowed to look back and to return to our previous life style, as we heard in the reading to the Galatians. Discipleship is a matter of priority: Who or what has priority in our life? Who has the first place in our heart? What are the permanent values in our life in contrast to seasonal or temporary values?

We have five negative items in our text that don't fit with true discipleship. Let's go through them and examine our life to see how our relationship is with Jesus and how we react to the challenges we face as Christians.

I – The opposition of the Samaritans

Jesus was in the north part of the country and He decided to go to Jerusalem in the south. He had two options: either to go through Samaria, the straightway; or to take the long way on the other side of the Jordan. The Samaritans were not friendly to the Jews, and

vice-versa. Even so, Jesus decided to go through Samaria and asked some disciples to go ahead and to prepare room for them in one of the Samaritan villages. But he was not welcome there and had to go to another village.

Jesus is still looking for room at our homes. Many make room for Him; others don't. He is even willing to stay with enemies, stretching His hand of reconciliation to them. The story repeats itself: They didn't have room for Him in Bethlehem when He was to be born; they didn't have room for Him in Samaria when He was on His way to Jerusalem; they don't have room for Him nowadays when he comes with His grace and forgiveness.

II – The anger of the disciples

The two disciples, James and John, became very upset with those people. They wanted to punish them, calling fire down from heaven to destroy them! – The two brothers were known as “sons of thunder” (Mark 3:17), maybe because of their explosive character.

Jesus didn't allow them to do it. “The Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.” Jesus is patient. He knew that time would come when many Samaritans would believe in Him, as we read in Acts 8, when first the Evangelist Philip and after him Peter and John preached the Gospel in several Samaritan villages and many Samaritans confessed their faith in Jesus and were baptized.

And John, the “son of thunder”, was transformed in ‘the apostle of love’, as we read it in his Gospel and in his letters. He became a totally different man when He came closer to Jesus and understood what faith in Jesus means: a life of love and forgiveness, because “God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son... not to condemn the world but to save the world through Him” (John 3:16-17).

After this first episode in Samaria, we have three people who wanted to follow Jesus. Each of them had a special concern that affects us as well, as disciples of Christ.

III – Lack of security

The first man said resolutely: “I will follow you wherever you go.” Jesus knows the heart and replied that even animals and birds have their holes and nests, but He, Jesus didn't have any permanent place to rest. He didn't have any property. He was just kicked out from the Samaritan village, where He had planned to rest. Jesus warned him that The Son of Man couldn't assure any physical or material security for him.

To follow Jesus doesn't mean prosperity, as some churches are preaching and promising it. Actually the opposite is true. Jesus and the Apostles didn't have any property. And at the beginning of Christianity, those who had any property used to sell it to give the money to the poor, as we read in Acts 4:36-37. If we have a property and we have a place to lay our head, let's thank God for it and let's not be selfish.

II – Family responsibility

The second man was called by Jesus to follow Him, but he used as excuse that first he had to bury his father. Maybe his father was not yet dead, but the man wanted to wait until his father passed away to follow Jesus, because the man had family responsibilities. – This is more difficult to understand. We all have family responsibilities and we have to accomplish them. We cannot neglect the care of our elderly parents, or of our children, or of our spouse. This is part of God's will. How can we understand this? – We have to link this text with another one, where Jesus says: “Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me...” (Matthew 10:37). It is a matter

of priority. If my father, or mother, or child, or anyone hinders my discipleship, I have to choose. What is more important, Jesus or my family? Will I abandon Jesus to follow my family and friends?

IV - I will follow you... but...

The third disciple had a very strong link with his family, which is a really good thing! But he had a ‘but...’ to follow Jesus: “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family”. – Maybe because of this text some Christian Churches don’t allow their priests to marry; they have to devote themselves totally to God... But this goes against one of the first commandments of God in paradise, that man and woman shall live together and become one flesh. – This is a matter of priority again, like in the previous situation as well.

Conclusion: We are not told what any of these men decided. But the challenges still remain. Have you ever tried to measure the cost of discipleship? What does it mean in your life to follow Jesus? What does it mean to be a Christian? Don’t give up and don’t find excuses to delay your decision. Jesus wanted you now and forever! The rest... is the rest. *“Seek ye first the kingdom of God and all these things shall be added unto you”*, we sang at the beginning of our Service. Jesus left His Father’s home and gave even His life to rescue us from sin, death and hell, and to give us a new life and a new hope. Is it too much for us to give Him our life, our time, our goods, our deeds, our family and whatever more we have? He will take care of us, be sure. The Psalmist says: *“Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him and He will help you.”* (Psalm 37:5). Amen.