**The costly choice of following Jesus. Luke 9:51-62 Sunday June 26 2022**

Significant discussions about discipleship often seemed to take place as Jesus travelled with his followers.[[1]](#footnote-1) Luke frequently describes Jesus travelling but usually does not identify precisely where he is, the geographic sequence is certainly not his emphasis. It seems to be purely the setting for some significant events and teaching.

Earlier in the chapter we read today, we read about Jesus transfiguration, this amazing affirmation of Jesus divine status and mission. It is interesting that so soon after this we see Jesus being rejected when he seeks to visit a Samaritan village. (Likewise earlier in this gospel not long after the similar affirmation at Jesus baptism, he is rejected in Nazareth).

Jesus starkly demonstrates that the call of God may certainly lead to rejection in some settings. These experiences of rejection foreshadow the rejection Jesus will experience in Jerusalem.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Against this backdrop of the stark reality of Jesus being rejected and following on from his statements that suffering and death await him, we encounter three potential followers of Jesus.

The first prospective follower comes with confidence, but “Jesus damps his ardour by warning that he doesn’t know what he is doing”.[[3]](#footnote-3) Jesus points out the cost of following him in stark terms, no home, no security, risking rejection. There is a huge gulf between volunteering to follow Jesus and genuine discipleship in companionship with Jesus who is on His way to the cross.[[4]](#footnote-4) This encounter challenges us to recognise that following Jesus may involve risks that threaten our security, and risks that disrupt our level of comfort.

Over the years some followers of Jesus have obviously given up significant things in life, financial security, business success, career prospects, proximity to close friends and family and personal safety. Many families,

and often many Christian families, have struggled to accept that family members making these choices were wise and right. God may call us to make some very difficult, risky or costly choices.

Some risks may not be so obviously significant, initiating the process of befriending some neighbours, joining a group you may never have considered in the past, undertaking some study in a field you have never anticipated studying. Sharing with a friend why you go to church. Sometimes God may challenge us to move significantly outside our comfort zone.

The second follower is called by Jesus, but he declares that first he needs to bury his father..

In our culture we seem to progressively distance ourselves from “dealing with the dead”. However this is not the case in all cultures and certainly was not the case in this context, there was a binding duty on devout Jews regrading care for the dead.[[5]](#footnote-5)Jesus words may seem harsh, following Jesus is to come above all else, nothing should be permitted to come between the disciple and the call of Jesus.

We may be called to actions that may be controversial in the eyes of others, we may be called to break away from the expectations others may have of us.

I have a couple of good friends who do not agree with females being ordained. At one crucial point when I was proceeding towards the process of candidating I was struggling with the prospect that this may damage my friendship with these people. I recall a faithful friend and pastor pointing out that, this may be part of the cost for me in following the call of God. I could see that I had to face this possibility. Thankfully our friendships remain strong.

I find it interesting to see how our major political parties have changed their rhetoric regarding climate change over the past few years, I also find it interesting that much of the protesting that seems to have influenced some of these changes has been from children, young people and grandparents. God may challenge us to take a very public stand on an issue of importance regardless of the controversy that may evoke in our normal social circles. We may believe that we should explain to our children how we perceived that God was challenging us to take this stand.

The third follower, like the first, offers to follow Jesus, but lays his own condition upon his following. He seeks to continue to exercise a measure of control over the process and direction of his life. The condition may seem reasonable, and mirrors what Elisha asked of Elijah. In that case, it was granted.

Jesus places a higher claim upon his followers. There can be no divided loyalties, even family ties cannot be a hindrance to responding whole-heartedly to Jesus. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, “there is no place for rash promises or misunderstandings regarding the cost of following Jesus.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

The call to follow Jesus is not a slight adjustment in life it is a definitive decision which ushers in an entirely new direction in life. Jesus’ message is not an abstract doctrine but a re-creation, an entirely new orientation in life, accompanied by a transformative process within the life of the follower.[[7]](#footnote-7)

We may be called to take actions which disappoint those close to us, family or friends, we may be called to make changes that have significant impacts on others whom we love, we may be called to make changes that others think extreme, as we wholeheartedly follow Jesus. We are certainly called as followers of Jesus to keep moving forwards.

When Jesus calls action is required, it is not merely intellectual assent. We often read of the followers of Jesus that they left all and followed Him.[[8]](#footnote-8) This phrase can become so familiar to us that we barely notice it, but it is absolutely, literally, exactly what they did. They left EVERYTHING and followed Jesus.

Jesus challenges us to give Jesus the highest priority, commit to discipleship and move ahead without looking back.[[9]](#footnote-9)

My call to ordained ministry involved quite a stark experience, which made the path ahead immediately and undeniably clear to me, however it also involved some dramatic changes and it took me some time to process this. I knew immediately that I needed to act, to do otherwise would to me have been choosing not to obey God. So I enrolled to begin theological studies the following semester.

I was exploring the process of candidating a few months later, and then our life as a family changed dramatically. My Son fell in love with Yolanda. She began to live with us and unfortunately became most unwell. Her malignancy was diagnosed and her very poor prognosis came as an immense shock to us all. I immediately felt the need to “mark time” in pursuing my call to Ministry, and so delayed my Period of Discernment, but equally I was convinced that I needed to continue to follow this call by continuing my studies.

About a year later Yolanda’s condition was being managed well, and I became unsettled about continuing to delay the next stage of moving towards candidating. I pursued this pathway and was delighted to be able to share that part of my journey with my daughter-in-law. I was accepted as a candidate just a few weeks before she passed away.

The ways in which God challenges us to keep moving forwards may be many and varied. They may involve twists and turns but it is important that we remain responsive to God. It may involve stretching our understandings and knowledge of God, perhaps by joining a study group, or reading more broadly. We may be challenged to consider more carefully the legacy that we want to leave in our families and community and to look at what we are doing to move towards achieving that. It may be that God challenges us to offer to take up some role in this church community or in some other group. There are endless possibilities.

Is God prompting You to move forward in some area?

1. Joel Green, *The Gospel of Luke: The New International Commentary on the New Testament,* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B,. Eerdmans Publishing, 1997) 406 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. R. Alan Culpepper, “Luke: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections” in Leander E. Keck et al (Eds) *The New Interpreters Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes,* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1995) 215 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship,* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1979) 64 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship,* 65 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Culpepper, “Luke: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections” 217 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Culpepper, “Luke: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections” 217 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship,* 67 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Matt 4:20, 22; Luke 5:28; Mark 10:28-30 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Culpepper, “Luke: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections” i218 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)