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Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY
6/26/2016, The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost, Lectionary 13
Luke 9:51-62

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

My opening text is the bold declaration of the man who would follow Jesus:

As they were going along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you *wherever* you go.” (Luke 9:57, RSV)

God bless him for his good heart! I hope he goes ahead and does as he says. Our Lord has warned him about foxes having their dens and birds their nests, but he has nowhere to lay his head. Still, I hope the man perseveres. I hope he hears about the foxes and the birds and says to himself, “Nonetheless, I have said I will follow Jesus wherever he goes, and I mean to do so! I am a man of my word. That’s my story, and I’m sticking to it! I mean to follow Jesus from now on.”

There is a prayer in our worship book that I think can help frame our discussion of this bold man. In fact, I mean to include this particular petition in this morning’s prayers. It a prayer for guidance and it goes this way:

Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings with your most gracious favor and further us with your continual help, that in all our works, *begun, continued, and ended* in you, we may glorify your holy name and finally, by your mercy, obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The man has begun well, promising to follow Jesus. But there is more to life than the beginning of a good path. There is also the continuing in that path and the ending in that path. Let’s look at this man in this triune way – his beginning, his continuing, and his ending.

First, his beginning. I am delighted with his boldness and his passion. There is nothing lukewarm about the man. He does not water down his discipleship with qualifications. He does not say, “I will follow you, Lord, as long as it seems good to me to follow.” Or “I will follow you unless the following becomes too hard.” Or, “I will follow you unless the crowds begin to leave you or the newspapers turn against you.” No, he says simply “I will follow you *wherever* you go.” You like to see such boldness and passion in someone who comes to the LORD. It is good to see some zeal and ardor for Jesus in those who first find him and come to him.

Note another good thing about this man: he puts forth the proper picture: Jesus leads, and he follows. Jesus chooses the path, and he means to follow in the footsteps of our Lord. Sometimes the Twelve disciples got ahead of themselves in that matter. Perhaps most startling of those occasions was the time Jesus poured

out his heart to his disciples and revealed to them that he was destined to suffer rejection and to be killed:

And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. (Mark 8:31, KJV)

But Peter conducted himself as if he were trading places with Jesus, so that Peter would be the master and Jesus the disciple:

And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him. (Mark 8:32, KJV)

It did not go well for Peter:

But when he [Jesus] had turned about and looked on his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan: (Mark 8:33, KJV)

That would hurt my feelings, to be rebuked by Jesus. It did not go well with Peter when he tried to correct Jesus. Nor will it go well for us, if we should try to become the teachers and masters of Jesus. He is a patient Lord, glad to say, who bears with us. But while time remains to us, and while we have some years ahead of us, we should try to mend our ways if we have been disagreeing with Jesus. We are not greater than our Lord. It is good to let him lead the way, even if that way seems cloudy, confusing, unpopular, or even dangerous. Let Jesus lead the way, and we follow. This man does that. He says that wherever Jesus goes, he will follow. He will go too.

So, that's the first point about this good man: He boldly begins his discipleship with Jesus.

Next, does he *continue* in that good path? Our text does not actually say. We know that Jesus cautions the man about the hard life he is undertaking. I mean this business of Jesus having nowhere to lay his head. I find this matter of nowhere to rest to be a moving image of emptiness and vulnerability in life. Even the beggars on the city streets usually carve out some spot where they can lie down and rest. There might be tacit understandings about this. There might be a hierarchy among the beggars, so that certain beggars get certain favorable spots to rest. But at least we can hope that there is *some* spot where each poor person can lay down his head. Even if a person is homeless, let us hope that they have some place where they lay their head each night, some place that feels kind of like their own. But Jesus has no certain place like that. Foxes have their dens and birds their nests, but He who is Maker of them all – the foxes, the birds, the beggars, the disciples, every living creature on earth... well, He has nowhere to lay his head. He tells this

new convert the truth about this. Does the man continue in his path? Again, we do not know. The Bible does not say.

But I do note something that makes me a little bit nervous for the man. I fear that he places too much confidence in his own plans and determination. He says, “I will do this. I will follow thee, Lord, wheresoever you go.” But he forgets to add a good prayer. He forget to say, “With God’s help.”

Think, for example, of our Affirmation of Baptism liturgy here at Immanuel. It seems to me that our new members are asked to make commitments every bit as bold as that of the man in this morning’s story. Indeed, our promises even speak of life and death, time and eternity. When a pastor stops to think of all that could be involved, it is a moving thing for the pastor to put these questions:

☐ *[Name]*, do you intend to continue steadfast in the confession of the Church, and suffer all rather than fall away from it?

It is not easy, my friends, to speak of suffering. But in this liturgy I ask a dear brother or sister in the Lord to “suffer *all* rather than fall away.” And I want that dear brother or sister in the Lord to answer Yes! It will be for the good of that person to answer Yes! So, I want that affirmative answer. And yet, the liturgy adds a proper prayer to that affirmative answer:

☒ I do so intend, *with the help of God*.

With the help of God we can do good things. With the grace of God, we can be faithful followers of Jesus. I worry some for this man in this morning’s story because he fails to speak of needing God’s grace for the good path he has set out on.

As for you and me, we live in a world that tempts us, vexes us, and exhausts us. If we mean to follow Jesus, we have a good and holy intention. But I bet we are going to need some grace for the journey. So be people of prayer and be people of the Church. Do as you are doing now. Continue to come to church and to avail yourselves of the means of grace.

So, we have spoken of the man’s beginning and of his continuing in his discipleship. Now, let us speaking of his ending his walk with the Lord. Let us speak of his walking his good walk all the way to the end, all the way into heaven.

Why shouldn’t the man walk all the way with Jesus? What has Jesus done, what is there about Jesus that would make it reasonable for us to forsake him? He is a poor man, that is true. The foxes and the birds have their homes, while Jesus is so poor he has no certain place to lay his head. Yet his poverty is for *our* sake. It is as St. Paul writes:

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. (2 Corinthians 8:9, RSV)

If you really care, then, about treasure, then lay up for yourselves wealth in heaven:

But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: (Matthew 6:20, KJV)

Why would we walk away from our Great Physician of body and soul? Why would we abandon the great Bishop and Guardian of our souls? Why would we stray from our Good Shepherd? Why would we wander from the God who so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that we should not perish but have everlasting life? And why would we turn and walk away from the One who on the cross fights through his pain and fear and disappointment and prays with his dying breath, "Father, forgive."

No, do not turn away from Jesus. If we would follow him, we are following a good path. Let it be one that is begun, continued, and ended in him, to whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.