

**Text:** <sup>57</sup> As they were going along the road, someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” <sup>58</sup> 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.” <sup>59</sup> To another he said, “Follow me.” But he said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” <sup>60</sup> But Jesus<sup>[a]</sup> said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” <sup>61</sup> Another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” <sup>62</sup> Jesus said to him, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

Are you surprised by the response of Jesus in our text today? Three people wanted to follow him, and Jesus turned them away. The first person told Jesus he would follow him and go wherever Jesus goes. Jesus’ response is that the way is going to be tough and he does not think that this person is willing to go where he is going which is to the cross. To the second person Jesus asked the person to follow him. The person’s response was conditional: “First let me first go bury my father.” Jesus informed him to let “the dead bury the dead.” The third person agreed to follow Jesus with the condition that he will follow Jesus after taking care of his family first. Jesus’ response was the person has to follow him immediately. Jesus makes a reference that once you put your hand to the plow, you can’t look backward and always have to be moving forward. Wow! Jesus turns away three people who offer to follow him. Either Jesus was having a bad day, or there is ultimate truth in his words.

Let me give you the bottom line. Jesus was not having a bad day. There is ultimate truth in the response he makes to these three individuals. Here is the issue. None of these three persons wanted to put their whole self in to fully follow Jesus. Do you remember the song, “The Hokey Pokey?” The analogy is that these persons – perhaps like many of us – want to put part of ourselves in the arena of following Jesus, but they never get to the part of putting their whole self in. So today we want to explore what it would be like to put our whole self into following Jesus, living daily like a disciple of Jesus.

Let me illustrate this with a hula-hoop. Hopefully, you will find you discover where you are today with Jesus. Are you like the person who only puts in a hand? You like reaching out towards Jesus as long as he doesn’t get too close. Are you like the person who puts in one arm? You will be a follower of Jesus as long as you can keep him at arm’s length. Are you like the people who put in about half of themselves? You really want to be known as one of Jesus’ followers, but there are still areas of your life that you have not turned over to him. The bottom line is that most of us have not put our whole self into following Jesus.

I think that is the issue that Jesus has with the persons in our text. While their intention was to follow him, to be a disciple of his, they only made a partial commitment. Jesus



knows they will only go so far with him. The problem was there are still areas of their lives they had not surrendered to Jesus and chose not to surrender to him. So, in reality, they are a lot like us. Here is the key question for us to consider: What keeps us from putting our whole self in? What keeps us from being a more fully committed follower of Jesus?

Our text has an answer. We don't put our whole self in because we are more satisfied with comfort than we are the cross. Let me say that again as disturbing as it sounds. We don't put our whole self in because we are more satisfied with comfort than we are the cross. That is certainly the issue with the first person in our text. He says, "I will go with you wherever you go." Where is Jesus going? He is going to Jerusalem to surrender his life by enduring agonizing suffering and dying on the cross. The first person has no understanding of what it means when he says he is willing to follow Jesus wherever Jesus goes. He wants to be around to hear Jesus preach and teach. He wants to be near Jesus to see the miracles he performs. He wants to be beside Jesus when Jesus redeems those judged unredeemable. That is so comforting to him ... and to us!

We are more interested in comfort than the demands of the cross. Leonard Sweet, an American theologian, pastor, author, and currently serves as the E. Stanley Jones Professor of Evangelism at Drew Theological School in New Jersey, says, "Many Christians today want a Jacuzzi Jesus, an experience that will leave them relaxed, warm, and bubbly, and yet at the same time feeling fit and trim when they get out -- like they've just gotten in shape." Those who seek a Jacuzzi Jesus want their soul to feel soothed, not stirred, comforted but not challenged, by their encounter with Christ. The problem is a Jacuzzi Jesus never helps you to become more than who you are. When you step out of a Jacuzzi nothing has really changed. For many, to follow the Master is more than having a Jacuzzi experience with Jesus. I think the first person in our text was looking for the Jacuzzi Jesus. His faith might be summarized by "I will follow you as long as" instead of "I will follow you whatever," and that is why Jesus does not accept his offer to follow him.

But it is easy to talk about someone else and their following Jesus. So, what about you and me? Are we willing to put our whole self in? To follow Jesus wherever that takes us, to do whatever it demands from us, to follow when it aligns with what we want and when it doesn't? Let me give a few concrete examples that might help you determine where you are.

Jesus wants us to forgive others as we have been forgiven. Yet many of us hold grudges and resentments because of the past that continue to seethe within us. So, while we want some parts of following Jesus, there is an area where we draw a line and refuse to forgive. In doing so, we cannot put our whole self in because within us is an unforgiving spirit.



From my perspective - and I think it is backed up by the teaching and example of Jesus - serving in some way - in a hands-on way - in the life of the church is just not an option. If you are a follower of Jesus who wants to put your whole self in, you have to serve, give back in some way. Do you realize that Jesus never asked for volunteers? Jesus never gave anyone an option to volunteer if they wanted to follow him. Being a follower of Jesus - getting involved in helping extend the mission and ministry of Jesus is a requirement of Jesus, not an elective. But many do not become involved because they don't think they have the time, the talent, and/or the desire.

One of the books I read as a teenager at the suggestion of my pastor was the book by Charles Sheldon, In His Steps. In the book the author asked every person in the church to ask one basic question to help them shape their discipleship: What would Jesus do? It is a good question, but I do not think it is the best question. I think a better question is "What would Jesus have me do?" I am not Jesus. I cannot do what Jesus would do. So the key question for me is what would Jesus have me do. This makes following Jesus a challenge because it take me out of my own frame of reference for decisions and forces me to put that aside and let Jesus frame my reference for life.

John Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement, preached a sermon entitled "The Almost Christian." He was preaching on Acts 26:28, where The Apostle Paul is trying to convince King Agrippa that Jesus is real based on Paul's own experience with Jesus. He tells the King about his own conversion on the Damascus Road. Before this experience, Paul was named Saul. He was determined that the Christian movement had to be stopped. He was on his way with official Roman warrants to arrest the Christians in Damascus when he was blinded by light and heard Jesus say to him, "Why do you persecute me?" It changed his life. In this conversation with King Agrippa, the Apostle Paul explains,

"<sup>19-20</sup> "What could I do, King Agrippa? I couldn't just walk away from a vision like that! I became an obedient believer on the spot. I started preaching this life-change—this radical turn to God and everything it meant in everyday life—right there in Damascus, went on to Jerusalem and the surrounding countryside, and from there to the whole world. But God has stood by me, just as he promised, and I'm standing here saying what I've been saying to anyone, whether king or child, who will listen. And everything I'm saying is completely in line with what the prophets and Moses said would happen: One, the Messiah must die; two, raised from the dead, he would be the first rays of God's daylight shining on people far and near, people both godless and God-fearing."

King Agrippa responds to Paul, "Almost, you persuade me to be a Christian." Wesley says, "Many there are who go thus far: ever since the Christian religion was in the world, there have been many in every age and nation who were almost persuaded to be Christians. But ... it avails nothing before God to go *only thus far*." This teaching of Jesus - it seems to demand our all, and leaves no room for going only so far, no room for almost following Jesus.



Maybe our response to Jesus is summed up in these words: "I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please. Not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep, but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk or a snooze in the sunshine. I want ecstasy, not transformation. I want the warmth of the womb, not a new birth. I want a pound of the Eternal in a paper sack. I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please."

We need to move beyond our comfort zone and get involved with what God is doing. Let me ask you a question: Do you believe that God is already at work in this church? In this community? In this world? Can I get an Amen? The first question to ask is not. "What should I do?" The first question is "What is God doing that he is seeking us to join him in doing?" If God is actively working to build his kingdom among us ... in this church ... in this community ... in this world .... How can you and I sit on the sidelines watching? We aren't putting our whole self in.

Jesus is not looking for volunteers. He is looking for followers who include in their discipleship ways to serve and make a difference by helping him build his kingdom on earth, the kingdom of love, forgiveness, grace, justice, and righteousness. Service in the name of Jesus is not optional. When our desire is only to come and receive and not give back, we have not put our whole self in.

The second person in our text came to Jesus, and Jesus explicitly said to him, "Follow me." The man's response in essence is "I want to follow you, but I have to go bury my father." Do you remember Jesus' response: "Let the dead bury the dead." Really? Compassionate, sensitive, kind Jesus said that? There are occasions in the scriptures when what is said does not seem to make sense. In those instances, you need to place the passage in a wider context. Isn't it obvious that Jesus would always allow time for someone whose father had just died to bury them? Of course it is.

So many Biblical scholars interpret that when the man says he wants to bury his father before following Jesus, it is an excuse not to follow now. It just could be that his father has not died, that his father isn't even ill, that his father could live for many more years. And Jesus knows that. So in essence his following Jesus has no priority in his life or has at best a very low priority. So one of the questions we have to ask ourselves is "Where does Jesus fit in my priorities?"

The third person in the text is in the same situation. He wants to go home and say goodbye to his family. Another translation says he wants to go home to take care of his family first. Jesus senses that this is not going to be a quick goodbye but only an intention to follow Jesus sometime later. Jesus talks about not putting your hand to the plow and looking back.

Here is the problem. Like these two people who have been invited to follow Jesus, we want to respond to make Jesus another additive to our life. Let me explain. We tend to



compartmentalize our life. We divide up our lives like pieces of one pie. One slice is my family life, one slice is my social life, one slice is my work life, and one slice is my political life, and one piece is my religious life. Our faith – being a follower of Jesus - is not just one slice of a bigger pie. Here is the problem. Jesus is not an additive. He is an alternative. Let me unpack that.

When Jesus is the alternative to life, when Jesus is the highest priority in life, He touches and desires to transform all of our life, family life, social life, work life ... every piece of the pie of our life. Jesus is not just one isolated piece of the pie. Jesus is that exquisite filling in the pie that touches and transforms every piece that makes what the pie what it is. It is that sweet taste we long for in every piece of the pie.

The second and third folks who come and say they want to follow Jesus start their response with “Yes, but ,,,” “Yes, *but first let me.*” “But *first.*” No matter how we shake it, these things we put into the “but first” category when God calls us are just that - things that we put *first*. God has some strong feelings about what we put *first* in our lives. We’ve talked more than once about *idols*. Consistently in the scriptures, one of the things we are warned against again and again is making *idols*, practicing *idolatry*. Although we might not relate as much to ancient peoples who crafted handmade images of other gods to worship, at the heart of it, *idolatry* is really whenever we give anything *other* than God the place of God in our lives. When we let anything else hold the place in our heart, our lives, our world, that is meant to be for God, when we worship anything other than God, when we center our lives around something other than God - that’s idolatry. And from Genesis to Revelation, this is the sin that is most dire, the one that most often results in a breakdown of the covenant between God and God’s people.

What would it look like if you made Jesus the number one priority in your life, in all the areas of your life? If Jesus were your number one priority, how would that change your interaction with your family? If Jesus were your number one priority in your life, how would that change your relationship with those in your social life? If Jesus were the number one priority in your life, how would that change your work life and your response to people with whom you work?

The Apostle Paul wrote about his experience of making Jesus a number one priority in his life and may be helpful for us. Just recall for a moment that Paul had been a different person and was known by a different name, Saul. Saul was one of the most highly educated people of his day. He judged that Jesus was a fake and wanted to stop people from being followers of Jesus. Then one day he had an experience with Jesus that changed his life and that is represented by changing his name from Saul to Paul. Following that transformation, Paul put his whole self in to follow Jesus. So here is what Paul said about his experience of making Jesus a number one priority in his life: “It is not I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”

That is what a true follower of Jesus experiences. That is our goal as we move forward in following Jesus in our lives. That is what it means to put our whole self in. Every day in every way we are seeking to live in such a way that we can say, "It is not I who live, but Christ who lives in me."

How would you answer this question: What can you do to put your whole self in as a follower of Jesus?

I am going to close with a prayer that was written by John Wesley in 1755. It is known as the covenant prayer. It is a prayer about putting our whole self in. It is written in the first person using the words I and me. Let his prayer be your prayer.  
Let's pray.

I am no longer my own, but thine.  
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.  
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.  
Let me be employed for thee or laid aside for thee,  
exalted for thee or brought low for thee.  
Let me be full, let me be empty.  
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.  
I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal.  
And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
thou art mine, and I am thine.  
So be it.  
And the covenant which I have made on earth,  
let it be ratified in heaven.  
Amen.