

## **“Journeying With Jesus”**

**Luke 9:57-62**

[www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=LUKE+9:57-62](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=LUKE+9:57-62)

**Dr. David W. Swink**

Chilson Hills Church, Brighton, Michigan

July 11, 2010

**Regina Brett, 90 year old reporter for the Cleveland Plain Dealer in her 45 themes to celebrate growing older says in theme 44: “Yield!”**

### **What does following Jesus mean?**

We could have a discussion among ourselves and come up with some very good responses. I can imagine that some of you would say serving others. Some would say living an ethical life. Some would say loving all people.

But, what would a man on the street interview teach us about how a person who attends no church would respond? You know as well as I do that their responses will be very different from ours.

One major public perception of Christians is that they do not know how to have fun. Erma Bombeck plays on this perception in a story she told. “In church the other Sunday I was intent on a small child who was turning around smiling at everyone. He wasn’t gurgling, spitting, humming, kicking, tearing the hymnals, or rummaging through his mother’s handbag. He was just smiling. Finally, his mother jerked him around and in a stage whisper that could be heard in a little theater off Broadway said, ‘Stop that grinning! You’re in church!’ With that she gave him a belt and as the tears rolled down his cheeks added, ‘That’s better’ and returned to her prayers.”

Other perceptions are that we are negative, arrogant, unsophisticated, uneducated and divided among ourselves. We do not have to stretch our imaginations very far to say that Christians around the United States have helped to create all these images.

Unfortunately, these public stereotypes keep many people from taking seriously Jesus invitation to discipleship. Jesus is not inviting people to be nice, live sweet, and make no fuss. Jesus is not inviting a person to be harshly critical, arrogant, and judgmental of everything that does not fit into their cultural framework.

Following Jesus does not involve a cultural plan. When you are on the journey with Jesus your agenda is to daily yield to Jesus’ leadership so that you can participate in God’s transforming action in the world.

### **Luke’s Three Nay Sayers**

The three people who encounter Jesus on his way to Jerusalem are challenged by Jesus to count the cost before they join the journey. The public perception was just as distorted when Jesus physically walked on the earth as it is now.

#### **Jesus challenges: Count the Cost**

The journey with Jesus can be a long, perilous, arduous, even deadly one. There are no guarantees of ease and glory. Little of worth comes without sacrifice. Jesus realizes that his path may lead to affliction, suffering, and a cross. Jesus’ challenge to you is to yield your self-centered, pleasure seeking ego so that you might follow Jesus. Yes, the journey might lead to suffering and affliction! And, it is in that very suffering that you find the courage to yield to Christ and grow with Christ.

Malcolm Muggeridge writes; *“The love of God, and affliction, are themes to which Simone Weil constantly returns. She sees affliction as a nail driven into our souls fastening us to the very center of the universe – the ‘true center, which is not in the middle, which is not in space and time, which is God.’ To deal with affliction, therefore, we have to go beyond thought and beyond the self, into the realm of Christ, who ‘conquered the world simply because he, being the Truth, continued to be the Truth in the very depth of extreme affliction.’*

*“In other words, affliction, which to our mortal eye is intolerable and even ridiculous, is the way to understanding and being fully alive, and, what is more, to being able to help the afflicted. It is the commonest complaint today that affliction disproves the existence of a love deity...Yet Simone Weil would say, as I consider justly, that, not only does affliction not disprove God’s existence – it uniquely manifests his presence. If every affliction were to be eliminated from our mortal existence, then, and then only, God really would be dead.”* (Malcolm Muggeridge, *Jesus Rediscovered*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1973, p.128)

Jesus knows that your journey with Him will go beyond the conventional, the conformist, and the culturally correct. Jesus knows that much will be demanded of you as His follower. The challenge is one of life and death. You are invited to stand against the forces of destruction, dysfunction, disaster, and even death itself. The power of God goes with you. The way we grow with God is through letting go, yielding, and turning loose of all that would hold us back. Jesus urges His would be follower in this passage of Holy Scripture to count the cost. Don’t just follow along for your own self-interest.

My friends this is a challenge that we need today. We have a tendency to see things through our own self-interest glasses. Mariah Cary, contemporary rock star says: “Whenever I watch TV and see those poor starving kids all over the world, I can’t help but cry. I mean I’d love to be skinny like that but not with all those flies and death and stuff.”

Jesus would say to her and to all of us who slip into the easy, quick fix mentality. *“Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”* Count the cost and be ready to sacrifice in order to transform the world! Following Jesus means investing our money, time, and talent in building up a Christ centered community so that we can make a difference for the poor, the marginalized, and the lost!

### **Jesus teaches that there are: Crucial Moments!**

Whenever Christ stirs up your heart it is important that you act. Psychologists tell us that a failure to act upon a good intention makes it easier to ignore the next one. Jesus encounters a second man whose heart is stirred. He wants to journey with Jesus. His rational, excuse filled mind; however, is just too strong.

Lest we think Jesus is too harsh here, let me put this encounter in context. In the Middle East, even until today, to take care of the parents is a life long responsibility. William Barclay tells of “a very brilliant young Arab who was offered a scholarship to Oxford or Cambridge. His answer was, ‘I will take it after I have buried my father.’ At the time his father was not much more than forty years of age.” (Wm. Barclay. The Gospel of Luke. P.131)

All of us come to those crucial moments of our lives. Our hearts are moved to act. Our minds tell us that Jesus is leading. We have a choice: follow or not follow. The frightening thing about such choices is that God really allows us to make them. God loves us enough to let us freely choose. God also loves us enough to allow us to accept the consequences of our choices.

Father Stan Rother was a priest serving in Guatemala. He faced a choice. The crucial moment of his journeying with Jesus lay in front of him. He could leave Guatemala and be safe. Essentially saying to Jesus, I need to go take care of my father. Or he could stay, continue to build God’s communities of hope and risk death. In a letter to Father Henri Nouwen he wrote these words:

*“The reality is that we are in danger. But we don’t know when or what form the government will use to further repress the Church. For a month or so now, all classes and group meetings have been cancelled. We are working in smaller groups. My associate and myself are seen less on the street and almost never leave the rectory at night. The tactic of the government has been to kidnap those they think are leaders, torture and kill them. Two days ago a young man from the neighboring parish was taken in the middle of the night. He is a cousin of one of our nuns. He is not expected to be found alive. If I get a direct threat or am told to leave, then I will go. But if it is my destiny that I should give my life here, then so be it. I don’t want to desert these people, and that is what will be said, even after all these years. There is still a lot of good that can be done under the circumstances. Pray for us that we may continue to serve as best we can in the reality where we find ourselves.”*

Father Stan Rother ultimately gave his life in Christ’s service. When a person’s heart is strangely warmed, then is the occasion of choice to serve Christ. We might not be called upon to give our lives as did Father Rother, but we will be called yield our self centered, pleasure seeking selves to Christ on a regular basis.

When you sit down to write a check to Christ’s church and you sense Christ saying, “Give More”! You have a choice.

- Excuses will come into your head, but they are only ways to put off following Jesus.
- Fear will bring all sorts of negative thoughts into your head, and these are only ways to put off following Jesus.
- All of the things you want to buy come roaring into your head, and these are only ways you can put off following Jesus.

Your challenge is to yield to Christ’s suggestion and trust in Christ to provide for you and your family! God’s economy depends on our yielding to God’s directive to give 10% of our income to Christ’s work. Each of us will have a “Divine Nudging” to follow God’s directives on a regular basis. Jesus asks all of us to choose to follow Him with our entire life so that in partnership with Jesus we can transform this world.

### **Jesus’ directions for life are: the Forward Focus**

A third person encounters Jesus on the road to Jerusalem. This person’s heart was moved to follow Him, but he wanted to turn around and take care of business before he began the journey.

Again we need to put this encounter in context. Saying goodbye in the Middle East can take months. It would involve preparing and giving a large party, organizing all your affairs with the family, and delegating all the work to others. Jesus does not have time to play the good bye games. Jesus’ journey is vitally important for the world. The invitation is to follow without looking back. Jesus says look forward, move ahead, stay focused on possibilities!

Any farmer, or even a weekend gardener, knows that a straight row can only be dug looking forward. The mission is accomplished by focusing on the goal. A sailboat can only make progress by choosing a point on the horizon toward which to sail. Looking back in life is disastrous.

Jesus’ invitation is to join in the forward movement of God’s transforming power on this earth. Looking back will not be helpful. Focusing on the past is the path of death. Even if your past is highly successful, a focus on it will bring disaster.

The Pizza Hut Corporation was the number one Pizza Corporation in America in 1985. In 1986, they almost went bankrupt. They were living on their past success and almost went bankrupt in one year.

Looking back, living in the past, letting your history determine the present, allowing the mental tapes from the past to play within your mind, will mean that you are lost in disease, destruction, dysfunction, and death.

What produces forward movement with Jesus on the journey is trusting in Christ's presence and yielding to Christ's leadership. Martin Luther King defines Jesus' process of living with a forward focus in his book, Stride Toward Freedom. He well knew the past results of the actions he was taking. Thousands of young African American men had been lynched in the early decades of the Twentieth Century. The past hung heavy on his mind. He writes:

*One night toward the end of January I settled into bed late, after a strenuous day. Coretta had already fallen asleep and just as I was about to doze off when the telephone rang. An angry voice said, "Listen nigger, we've taken all we want from you, before next week you'll be sorry you ever came to Montgomery." I hung up, but I couldn't sleep. It seemed that all of my fears had come down on me at once. I had reached a saturation point. I got out of bed and began to walk the floor. Finally I went to the kitchen and heated a pot of coffee. I was ready to give up. With my cup of coffee sitting untouched before me I tried to think of a way to move out of the picture without appearing a coward. In this state of exhaustion when my courage had all but gone, I decided to take my problem to God. With my head in my hands, I bowed over the kitchen table and prayed aloud. The words I spoke to God that midnight are still vivid in my memory. "I am here taking a stand for what I believe is right. But now I am afraid. The people are looking to me for leadership, and if I stand before them without strength and courage, they too will falter. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left. I've come to the point where I can't face it alone." At that moment I experienced the presence of the Divine as I had never experienced Him before."*

As individuals and as a congregation, we are called to yield our lives to Jesus so that we might live the abundant, challenging, joyful, life of transforming love in a community of transforming love.

### **Jesus invites you to: Journey With Jesus**

When Jesus invites you to walk the journey with Him, then you will feel your heart strangely warmed. You will also hear excuse after excuse pound into your brain. The first choice sets up all other choices. Your first choice is a leap of faith, a step of trust, an act of a loving heart; a yielding to the Divine initiative within your life. Then, Jesus gives you the courage to respond to the daily Divine initiatives within your life. And finally you are invited to let go of the past and follow Jesus into God's future.

Jesus invites you to join with and to build up a community of people who are committed to work with Him to transform the world. On the road Jesus will give you a task. Along with this specific job will come the Spiritual gifts and power to do the job well. You will not have a road map. You will not have everything you need before you start out. You will have only a willing heart and eager mind. You will still question. You will still doubt. You will still wonder.

The key to the abundant life journey God promises each of us is yielding to Jesus. When you daily walk with Jesus, you are not lost or alone. You will be able to climb every mountain, forge every stream, follow every by way and ultimately live God's incredible dream for your life.