

Luke 9:57-62
Galatians 5:13-25
June 26, 2022

Following Jesus

When someone is in the market for a job, there are several considerations. What is the job? What kind of work does it entail and what are the conditions? Where will one be required to locate in order to be able to show up for work? How much is the pay?

There is no dancing around the conclusion that too often, if there is a choice, the highest paying option is chosen, even if it means uninteresting work in a field outside one's aptitudes and education, involving long hours in difficult conditions, moving to a place far away from family and friends.

It would be easy to say that a lesser paying job, and less money does have implications for all of life, would be the happiest choice. Who knows how many people have traded happiness for money? On the other hand, being a Christ-follower does not simply mean choosing the lesser paying job in favor of more meaningful work, the proximity of family and friends and better conditions. One can choose less money for entirely selfish reasons.

Sometimes following Christ can lead to a higher income. It happens all the time. I offer this topic, vocation, as an illustration, like a metaphor, to help us better understand the life to which we are called as Christ's disciples. It is about counting the cost.

We are guided by our two texts. The reading from Galatians sets it out in plain terms; the contrast between the spirit and the flesh, or maybe we can see it as the image of God in us and the presence of sin. They are in conflict, and when one submits to sin, or flesh, or the sinful nature, life turns in a particular way; and when submits to a life following Jesus, it turns in a different way, hence the two lists.

Paul mentions sexual immorality, selfish ambition (mark that), hatred, discord, jealousy, debauchery, just to mention a few. On the other hand, called to a life of service in love, the outcome of the spirit is, and we cannot repeat it enough times; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. It is about counting the cost in terms of what kind of persons we seek to be.

The other reading from Luke's gospel frames things differently, and is also challenging. "I will follow wherever you go," said the would-be disciple. And the reply of Jesus seems to be an attempt to talk the disciple out of it. Maybe it is hyperbolic, "birds have nests and foxes have dens but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

Most nights, Jesus probably did have a place to lay his head, and so do we. Christ following does not mean one will not have a place to sleep, but forces us to reckon that we may not always know where that place will be, may decide that it wouldn't be the place of our choosing, if it was up to us, and certainly it means that we might not be able to consider

ourselves the owner of the place, as if any of the things we say we own are really ours permanently.

Another would-be follower wanted to wait, not just for his father to die, in the sense that his father was near the end, but waiting until he was released from his obligation to his parents before committing to a life of discipleship, might be decades. The answer of Jesus is consistent throughout the gospels; our lives are *presently* demanded of us. There is no waiting.

At this point, Jesus is so provocative that he forbids a farewell to friends and family. All of this to illustrate for us that there is more to life than work and wages, tasks to be done, family and friends. But this can't possibly mean that in terms of this life each new follower of Christ will be uprooted like Abraham to move away to some other place. It is about counting the cost in terms of where one will be and what kinds of things one will be doing.

If the first text admonishes us to be as good as we can with God's help, no matter the specific circumstances, telling us that in general our lives will look like the second rather than the first list, then we might think of the second text as addressing the more external aspects of our lives. It doesn't settle the question except in regard to the willingness to be ready for anything, good or bad, hard or easy. Very often, there are moments of peace.

Sometimes following Jesus *is* hard, but there is not austerity here. The proclamation of the gospel, good

news, is not that life is hard, but that it is a precious and holy gift, to be nurtured and cherished. Believers are presented with a choice between attitudes, the life of faith, which becomes the life of God, and the life of unbelief, which becomes the life of the self. One must consider things ahead of time.

So why does Jesus seem to be trying to talk people out of the life of faith, out of a commitment to following Christ? Why does he say;

“Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head?”

Let the dead bury their own?

No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the Kingdom of God.”

Why does Jesus ask all of us to count the cost? I am convinced that we are framing the question wrongly. Life in service to Christ is not one option among many, that only has implications for those interested in it while others can go on their way. The gospel is about life, and those who don't choose faith, choose a path with some real difficulties.

There are some general truths for those who choose a life of following. That:

Life is meaningful and choices matter
Goodness is real, there is moral in nature and one should seek the good

A successful life is one of service
Mercy is just and forgiveness is God's nature, and we
are to seek to make it our own
Death is a gate and not a dead end.

When considered that way, a hesitance to follow, a
turning back, doesn't make sense . . . that is what
Jesus is saying, Paul would agree. All things
considered, if the life of faith was like a job, they would
say take it.

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