

ASH WEDNESDAY SERMON  
 First Lutheran Church  
 Aitkin, Minnesota

Luke 9:51-62  
 Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen  
 March 1, 2017

### The Challenge of Following

We were **created to be in a love/trust relationship with God. We are at our best; our world is at its best, only when we trust our lives, families and all that we have safely into God's keeping.** In our text for today, Jesus is doing that very thing. **"When the time drew near for (Jesus) to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem."** You know the story, Jesus is headed for Jerusalem where he knows he will be tortured and killed so that humans might be **brought home to God.** Jesus has told the disciples what's ahead. But, they don't understand. **Jesus is going to trust God all the way to his death and beyond.** This text is all about **trusting God.** This text is **all about Jesus.**

Jesus is on the last leg of his earthly journey. He sends some messengers ahead to a Samaritan town to prepare a place for him to eat and rest along the way. The Samaritans, hearing that he is a Jew on his way to the Jewish holy city, Jerusalem, want nothing to do with Jesus. They didn't welcome him. Jesus' disciples, hateful of the Samaritans anyway, asked if they should call down fire from heaven to consume them. Jesus rebuked his own followers for wanting to see **judgment and destruction rain down on the earth.** **Jesus came to bring forgiveness and life to this earth.**

Jesus is **trying to reconnect all the people of the world with our Creator.** Jesus is trying to restore the love/trust relationship God made us to be in. Jesus has been inviting people to come and follow him. In our text, **some folks do step up.**

- One said, **"I will follow you wherever you go."** And Jesus responded, **"Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."** Jesus has nothing to claim but the clothes on his back and even these will soon be stripped away.
- Jesus invites another person, **"Follow me."** But that one said, **"Lord, first let me go and bury my father."** And Jesus responded, **"Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God."**

- Another said, “**I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home.**” Jesus said to him, “**No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.**”

**How hard it must be to follow Jesus.** Jesus shows no compassion for these would-be followers. These are not petty excuses for waiting. Burying a loved-one, saying ‘Goodbye’ to your family, hoping for some assurance of security. . . They have really good reasons for not immediately walking into the future with Jesus. This is all about Jesus. Jesus is driving home the fact that **nothing is more important in life** than:

- **Being a part of Jesus’ life-giving kingdom**
- **Growing Jesus’ kingdom** in:
  - o **Our own lives,**
  - o **The world around us.**

Remember, we were created to be in a love/trust relationship with God, neighbor and earth. There is no better place to be. Jesus invited those ancient Christians to follow.

The first followers of Jesus failed miserably – arguing about which one was most important, betrayal, denial, running and hiding when Jesus needed them most. It wasn’t just those ancient brothers in the faith who failed Jesus. I fail miserably. We fail miserably. In my own life, I don’t pray like I should. I don’t read scripture like I should. I keep my mouth shut when I should be speaking up. I forget to say “Thank you” when prayers are answered, when the sun rises in the morning, when I lay my head on my pillow at night. Too often, I forget all about God as I’m working my way through my everyday life – struggles, hopes and dreams.

**Ash Wednesday. “From dust you have come. To dust you shall return.”** A cross of ashes on your forehead. In the **first chapter** of Genesis, God **speaks** and day by day everything comes into being, including humans – God’s work. And God promises to care for them in every way. In the **second creation account**, Genesis 2, God scoops up some of God’s precious earth and **molds** human beings into existence. God also shapes the animals from the dust of the earth. We are related, we are **kin to God**, to **each other**, to the **earth beneath our feet**. In this second chapter account of God’s creative work, God makes clear that God wants us to **live out our lives in a love/trust relationship with God**. God makes a covenant/promise with us. **“Love and trust me to take care of**

**you. Then that will set you free to love and care for each other and the creation.**” By the end of the **third chapter** of Genesis, humans have **broken that love/trust relationship** by trying to be **god themselves**. By determining that they want to be **in charge** of their own lives. By determining that they **can get along just fine** without the One who gave them life and who promised to care for them every day.

The second creation story pictures it. Lutherans believe it. Creator God stoops down on hands and knees, scoops up some of God’s good soil, shapes it into human beings and breathes life into it. God dreamt us up. God brought us into this world. And on our last day, we will once again return to the dust from which we first came. We are mortal. We die. **What happens next is totally up to God. It all is. Our whole lives are totally up to God.** We just keep forgetting that. We just keep trying to take care of ourselves, to live without loving and trusting God every day.

When I mess up my back and am not faithful enough in doing my recovery exercises. When my wife, Jennifer, rolled and totaled out our pickup truck and received only minor injuries. When our 39 year old daughter, Leah, gets married in May. When there aren’t enough hours in the day to get everything done. The house I live in on White Sand Lake. When we are fearful of what tomorrow might bring. When we lose the person we love most in the entire world. **When we are born. When we die. Eternity. All in the hands of God.** All in the hands of God who says, **“I love you. I will take care of you. Trust me. Follow me.”**

Jesus is the **first and only truly human being** who has ever existed. Only Jesus has been able to:

- Totally **love and trust God** even to his death and beyond,
- **Give himself away** in love and care for neighbor and creation.

Those first disciples failed to do what Jesus asked of them. The people along the way could not measure up to God’s expectations of them. I can’t follow Jesus anywhere near to what God asks of me. Jesus asked them, Jesus asks us – to follow. God asks us to love and trust God to take good care of us. God asks us to love and care for neighbor and creation. **I can’t imagine how disappointed God must be in me some days.** I try. You try.

We are at our best; our world is at its best, only when we trust our lives, families and all that we have safely into God's keeping. I can't do it. Jesus did it. Then they killed him, I killed him, we killed him. Lent. Ash Wednesday. **Our lives, future, eternity – all rest in the hands of God.** In the **grace of God.** **This is all about Jesus.** He went to **die for us.** Then he **rose again for us.** **Forgave us,** again and again. **And Jesus is not about to let us go.** **That's how much God loves us.** **“From dust you have come. To dust you shall return.”**

Somehow, those first disciples managed to **trust and follow, even just a little bit.** Thanks to the **Holy Spirit** living within them, within us. And so, **because God didn't give up on them,** we are here today. **It's our turn to follow.** And God loves you and me, cares for you and me in every way, and every day God waits. . . Welcome home to God, dear sisters and brothers in Christ. **Our life and hope is all about Jesus.** Trust God and live well each day, one day at a time. Thanks be to God. Amen.