

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, 6th Sunday After Pentecost, June 26, 2016

There Is No Looking Back

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Galatians 5:1, 13-25 Luke 9:51-62

Have you ever thought about the commitment that you made when you professed Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? Have you really thought about it?

Most of us haven't!

Our scripture reading from Galatians summarizes that commitment. It begins saying, *"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by the yoke of slavery."*

This passage mentions freedom that Christ has granted us --- but what does that mean? Freedom from what? Freedom to do anything we please?

No way! It means freedom in Christ, not freedom in the way that we think of freedom in today's world. It is freedom from Mosaic Law --- freedom to follow Jesus' law, to follow Christ --- freedom to love your neighbor as yourself.

It is a commitment, one from which there is no looking back --- one which places an obligation on all Christians --- one which places an obligation on us.

It is not freedom to do anything we want. Our scripture reading specifically lists *"... sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, orgies, and the like"* as things we are not free to do. So what is this freedom? It is freedom from sin and once you accept Christ, there is no looking back.

This was driven home rather forcefully to Jesus' followers as they walked toward Jerusalem with Jesus to celebrate the Passover and to face what Jesus knew would be his crucifixion. They would pass through a Samaritan village and Jesus had sent some of them ahead to the village to make arrangements to spend the night there but they were rejected by the Samaritans.

We are not really sure why they were turned away but our scripture reading from Luke suggests that it was because they were going to Jerusalem. Presumably that meant that the Samaritans felt slighted that Jesus would not spend any time with them.

They probably felt that they were playing second fiddle to the Jews and, as we know, there was no love lost between the Samaritans and the Jews. So, contrary to the custom of the times to welcome strangers, they weren't welcomed --- they were refused hospitality.

The disciples were so angry that they wanted to burn down the village but Jesus rebuked them and said to go on and don't look back. So they went on to the next village which did offer them hospitality.

When continuing on their journey, one of the group said that he would follow Jesus wherever he went. Jesus replied, *"Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."*

What Jesus was really saying was that anyone who follows him has to be aware of the hardships and the real cost of doing so. Quoting William Barclay ⁽¹⁾, *"No one can ever say that he was induced to follow Jesus under false pretenses."*

Once one commits to follow Jesus there is no looking back. Barclay also said, *"It may well be that we have done a great hurt to the church by letting people think that church membership need not make so very much difference. We ought to tell them that it should make all the difference in the world."* The commitment to Christ means that there is no looking back.

Jesus said to a second disciple, *"Follow me"* and he replied, *"Lord, first let me go and bury my father."* Jesus replied, *"Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."*

Wow! This seems incredibly harsh. Did Jesus mean this the way it sounds?

According to the Zondervan Bible Backgrounds Commentary ⁽²⁾, Jesus probably meant *"... to let those who are spiritually dead bury the physically dead. Some commentaries have sought to soften Jesus' words by suggesting that the man is requesting a long delay until his father dies (which could take years) or that he is referring to the reburial of bones in a common family grave after the flesh had rotted off of the bones (which could take a year). It seems more likely that the man's father has already died or is near death. Jesus' reply is meant to be truly radical and countercultural."* Jesus is telling the disciple that he must make a decision to follow him or not and that, once the decision is made to follow Christ, there can be no looking back.

Barclay said, *“The man in the story had stirrings in his heart to get out of his spiritually dead surroundings; if he missed that moment, he would never get out.”*

If we don't act on something when the opportunity presents itself, it is very likely that we won't act on it at all. *“Jesus urges us to act at once when our hearts are stirred.”* (Barclay). In today's vernacular, Jesus is telling the man that push has come to shove. Decide now or not at all. You won't have another chance.

A third man says that he will follow Jesus but first he wants to go home and say goodbye to his family. He gets essentially that same radical response from Jesus.

Jesus is claiming, *“... priority over the best, not the worst, of human relationships. Jesus never said to choose him over the devil but to choose him over the family. And the remarkable thing is that those who have done so have been freed from possession and worship of family and have found the distance necessary to love them”* ⁽³⁾ even more.

“Becoming a disciple of Christ ... does not mean that we are to forget our past relationships. Saying goodbye means that God wants us to follow Him on His terms --- wholeheartedly. Then we will see people again from the right perspective.” ⁽⁴⁾

Think about it. Jesus is saying, “Make your choice. Follow me or not, but if you follow me there is no looking back.” Follow Jesus and bring your family along.

Amen.

1. William Barclay, The Gospel of Luke, rev. ed., Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1975.
2. Clinton E. Arnold, ed., Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary, Vol. 1, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI., 2002
3. Fred B. Craddock, Interpretation: Luke, John Knox Press, Louisville, 1973.
4. Our Daily Bread, “Saying Goodbye”, January 14, 2016.

Note: Scripture quotations are from the New International Version of the Bible, 2011