

26th June 2022 – Morning Service

The demands of discipleship

Colin Russ

Call to Worship - Luke 14:26, 27 & 33

Whoever comes to me and does not turn away from father and mother, wife and children, brother and sister, yes, and life itself, cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. Therefore, none of you can be my disciple if you don't give up all your possessions.

In direct words, Jesus sets out the requirements for those seeking to follow Him. They are challenging, demanding and certainly not for the faint hearted or weak willed.

StF 354 – Jesus is the name we honour

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| 1) Jesus is the name we honour;
Jesus is the name we praise.
Majestic name above all other names,
The highest heaven and earth proclaim
That Jesus is our God. | 2) Jesus is the name we worship;
Jesus is the name we trust.
He is the King above all other kings,
Let all creation stand and sing
That Jesus is our God. |
| Ch) <i>We will glorify, we will lift Him high,
We will give Him honour and praise.
We will glorify, we will lift Him high,
We will give Him honour and praise.</i> | 3) Jesus is the Father's splendour;
Jesus is the Father's joy.
He will return to reign in majesty,
And every eye at last will see
That Jesus is our God. |

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Prayer

Holy God, majestic creator of this amazing universe, you are beyond measure, time and space. The earth reflects your glory as seasons come and go, and as new life is created. You have made us in your image, to share your life and live in a day by day relationship with you, our heavenly father.

We have failed to honour you as we ought. Forgive us Father that we so often spurn the opportunity to give you your rightful place in our lives, but choose instead to live to satisfy our own selfish desires. In your love and compassion for all you have made, you sent your precious Son Jesus Christ, to reveal your grace and to die so that all people might have the opportunity of salvation from the effects human sin and weakness. Holy God we come before you trusting in Jesu's name to seek your forgiveness. Hear us Father as we pray in the power of the Holy Spirit that, we may be enabled to put our trust in your Son and so receive all that He has achieved for us through His teaching, His sacrifice at Calvary and His glorious resurrection. As we bring our worship today, help us to feel your powerful presence, to hear you speak to our needs, and so be enabled by your Holy Spirit to live as effective disciples of your Son and our Saviour in whose name we pray, **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

Reading: 2 Kings 2:1, 6-15

Now when the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal. Then Elijah said to him, 'Stay here; for the Lord has sent me to the Jordan.' But he said, 'As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.' So the two of them went on. Fifty men of the company of prophets also went, and stood at some distance from them, as they both were standing by the Jordan. Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to the one side and to the other, until the two of them crossed on dry ground.

When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, 'Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you.' Elisha said, 'Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit.' He responded, 'You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not.' As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha kept watching and crying out, 'Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!' But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces. He picked up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. He took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and struck the water, saying, 'Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah?' When he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha went over. When the company of prophets who were at Jericho saw him at a distance, they declared, 'The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha.' They came to meet him and bowed to the ground before him.

Reading: Luke 9:51-62

When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; but they did not receive him, because his face was set towards Jerusalem. When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, 'Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?' But he turned and rebuked them. Then they went on to another village.

As they were going along the road, someone said to him, 'I will follow you wherever you go.' 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.' To another he said, 'Follow me.' But he said, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father.' But Jesus said to him, '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 plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.'

StF 432 – O the bitter shame and sorrow

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| 1) O the bitter shame and sorrow,
That a time could ever be
When I let the Saviour's pity
Plead in vain, and proudly answered:
None of you and all of me!
None of you and all of me! | 3) Day by day your tender mercy,
Healing, helping, full and free,
Firm and strong, with endless patience
Brought me lower, while I whispered:
More of you and less of me!
More of you and less of me! |
| 2) Yet you found me; there I saw you
Dying and in agony,
Heard you pray: Forgive them, Father!
And my wistful heart said faintly:
Some of you and some of me!
Some of you and some of me! | 4) Higher than the highest heaven,
Deeper than the deepest sea,
Lord, your love at last has conquered;
Grant me now my spirit's longing:
All of you and none of me!
All of you and none of me! |

Theodore Monod CCL No. 515642

Reflection

The gospel records many things done and said by Jesus. Sometimes what He says, as in the words we were reminded of at the start of our worship and here in the reading from Luke 9, comes across as harsh, uncaring and unsympathetic. It may be partially as a result of the writers doing their best to summarise in a few words what Jesus had said and meant. But I suspect it was Jesus using blunt, stark words to make clear what is necessary to be a disciple. This passage from Luke 9 is such an example of the hard hitting, challenging style of what Jesus had to say on the subject of discipleship and sharing in His ministry of proclaiming the good news of God's love and saving grace. Let's look at what He said.

1 'I don't even have a place of my own to sleep.'

This was in response to someone saying he was prepared to follow Jesus wherever He went. I feel Jesus is saying 'do you really mean that.' For what Jesus offers His followers is risk, vulnerability and physical uncertainty which means such folk will need to show complete trust in Him. The things that are normal and natural needs for people would have to become lower in the pecking order of desires so that doing Christ's will could be paramount. But on the plus side there is the opportunity of a full and fruitful life for those willing to let go and submit to Him and the Holy Spirit leading. In Mark 8 v 35 Jesus said 'If you insist on saving your life, you will lose it. Only those who throw their lives away for my sake and for the sake of the good news will ever know what it means to really live.' The Old Testament reading is an example of single minded determination as Elisha insists on staying close by Elijah no matter what so that he will inherit Elijah's spirit and power when Elijah leaves this life at the end of his work on earth. Jesus demands that His followers trust Him totally, but promises a new way of living fruitfully in His service.

2 Let the dead bury their dead

This was Christ's response to a potential disciple who wanted to wait and bury his father before joining Jesus. Had his father died or did he want to wait until he had died? Jesus told him there were others who could take care of that important family duty, and that it would be taken care of without the man's input. The important point Jesus makes is that of other issues crowding in on a person so that she/he isn't ready to give the required dedication to following Him. Jesus wants disciples who are totally focussed on seeking to be like Him and are ready to give everything in His service. The man effectively said he would join Jesus when he was ready which was not a solid commitment and may never happen. The commitment Jesus wanted just wasn't there in the man's response. Paul says (Colossians 3 v 13,14) '*This one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on towards the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ.*'

The challenge is for His followers to give single minded commitment to Christ's call on our lives. A few years ago, I went to play 10-pin bowling with friends. During the first series of games, I tried very carefully to send the bowl along the lines of the wooden floor timbers. I played very badly, coming in last of around ten friends. When it came to the second round of matches, I tried a different approach. Instead of looking at the lines in the lane, I just looked at the target pin and sent the bowl down. The transformation was dramatic and I won the second round of matches decisively. I think that was what Jesus was talking about. He wants His followers to be single minded and focussed on Him and His teaching, not distracted by things going on around them.

3 No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the Kingdom.

This time the potential disciple had said he wanted to follow Jesus but first wished to go and say cheerio to his family. What might Jesus be teaching us here? It seems a reasonable thing for the man to want to do. Perhaps Jesus may have been making the point with blunt language, that if His followers are anxious or concerned about maintaining family relationships for instance, they may not be able to commit fully to the task in hand. Jesus' need is for people who are looking forward with hope and certainty, rather than looking back with doubt and nostalgia. This may explain His response to the man in question.

Many years ago I played football for the Boys brigade at Overend Mission. On the morning of our home games, I went to mark the out the pitch with fresh sawdust. At first I found myself doing short lengths then looking back to see if the line was straight before making any adjustments I felt necessary. The result was a touchline like a dog's hind leg. I soon realised that to keep looking back wasn't the answer. I needed to fix my eyes on the next focal point eg. the corner flag, and go for it. It made all the difference to the straightness of the markings.

It seems that Jesus is concerned that looking back longingly might create doubt, uncertainty and conflicting priorities. He wants us to look forward with reassurance and at all times to prayerfully seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we seek the next task or opportunity to share God's love with the people around us. As the letter to Hebrews reminds us in 12 v 1-2 *Let us lay aside every weight of sin that holds us back, and let us run with perseverance the race that is before us looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.*

StF 462 – Come with me, come wander

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| 1) Come with me, come wander,
Come welcome the world
Where strangers might smile or where stones
may be hurled;
Come leave what you cling to,
Lay down what you clutch
And find, with hands empty, that hearts
can hold much. | 3) Come share in my laughter,
Come close to my fears,
Come find yourself washed with the
kiss of my tears;
Come stand close at hand while I suffer and die
And find in three days how I never will lie. |
| <i>Ch) Sing hey for the carpenter leaving his tools!
Sing hey for the Pharisees leaving their rules!
Sing hey for the fishermen leaving their nets!
Sing hey for the people who leave their regrets!</i> | 4) Come leave your possessions,
Come share out your treasure,
Come give and receive without method
or measure;
Come loose every bond that's resisting
the Spirit,
Enabling the earth to be yours to inherit. |
| 2) Come walk in my company,
Come sleep by my side,
Come savour a lifestyle with nothing to hide;
Come sit at my table and eat with my friends,
Discovering that love which the world
never ends. | |

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Prayers of Intercession

Loving God, we pray that by the power of your Holy Spirit, we will be made strong in your service and faithful in following our Saviour in making known, by the way we live day by day, your mercy and grace revealed in Jesus Christ.

We pray for your church on earth, that it would declare with clarity and power the good news of your love for all. Lord make the body of Christ dynamic and relevant to modern life and to those who need your blessing.

We pray for this troubled world as we witness conflicts and heartbreak in Ukraine, Russia and other places. Merciful God and Saviour we plead for peace, justice and righteousness to be established for all people.

We pray for all in need, especially those struggling and not knowing how they can cope. We ask that you will bless all who lead and make big decisions with wisdom and integrity. Help them to be compassionate and genuine in their efforts to bring about a fair and just society in which all of creation can flourish.

Merciful God and Saviour, we bring before you all whose needs are laid upon our hearts today. In this moment we remember them..... [*Silence*]

Father you know each one and every detail of their need. Loving God bless them and wrap them in the blanket of your love because they are all precious in your sight. We pray to you in the name of our Saviour Jesus Christ, **Amen.**

StF 439 – Abba Father

Abba Father, let me be
Yours and Yours alone.
May my will forever be
Evermore Your own.

Never let my heart grow cold,
Never let me go,
Abba Father, let me be
Yours and Yours alone.

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StF 447 – Jesus, be the centre

1) Jesus, be the Centre,
Be my Source,
Be my Light,
Jesus.

*Ch) Be the fire in my heart,
Be the wind in these sails;
Be the reason that I live,
Jesus, Jesus.*

2) Jesus, be the centre,
Be my hope,
Be my song,
Jesus.

3) Jesus, be my vision,
Be my path,
Be my guide,
Jesus.

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Blessing

Father God, bless us as we seek to serve you.

Loving Saviour Jesus Christ, help us live as your disciples.

Holy Spirit by your living presence and enabling power make us alert to opportunities to share God's love and so help build His kingdom here on earth. In the name of Christ your Son we pray. **Amen.**