

July 1st, 2007 Luke 9:51-62

In the spirit of David Letterman's top ten lists, I would like to give you the top ten excuses that I found on the internet for people having to miss work.

10. I don't think I'll be in work for awhile. Yesterday I was riding my son's BMX bike and I fell and broke my ankle it two places and I'm in the hospital.

9. I am stuck in the blood pressure machine down at Wal-Mart.

8. Can't come in today, the springs on the garage door broke and I can't get the car out cause the door won't open.

7. I sprained my wrist cooking dinner in the microwave last night.

6. Last night a friend I haven't seen in a long time came over and gave me a bear hug and broke one of my ribs, so I won't be in today.

5. I'd love to come to work today, but I got on the wrong train and I'm now in Edinburgh.

4. "The dog ate my car keys. And we're going to hitchhike to the vet."

3. " I'm sorry I can't make it in today. Somebody spiked my drink last night"

2. I was sick yesterday but I still came in to work. But I'm feeling better today so I'm calling in sick.

And the number one excuse for why someone skipped work was:

1. I saved so much money by switching to Geico; I don't have to work today.

I wonder if Jesus had a top ten list for of excuses of why people couldn't follow him. In today's Gospel, we hear the excuses of two different people about why they can't follow Jesus immediately.

We hear of the fellow who wants to follow Christ but, first needs to go bury his father.

And then we hear from another fellow who again wants to follow Christ, but first wants to go back to say goodbye to his family.

However, Jesus rebuffs both of the men's requests with these rather straight forward responses. To the first he says-- "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you go and proclaim the kingdom of God..." and to the second-- "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

There are to be no conditions placed upon their following of Christ, on their inhibiting of Christ mission. As a Nike commercial would tell us "Just do it." Jesus plainly and simply says "Just follow me." Unconditionally.

However, don't their two requests seem rather reasonable---why can't the poor guy go and bury his dead father? Why can't the young man say goodbye to his family? Perhaps Jesus rationale is as NT scholar and preacher Fred Craddock sees it when he writes—

“The radicality of Jesus’ words lies in his claim to priority over the best, not the worst, of human relationships. Jesus never said to choose him over the devil but to choose him over family. And those who have done so have been freed from possession and worship of family and have found the distance necessary to love them.”

Craddock's view is tough to swallow. However, family, like many things in our lives (money, possessions, or time) is no less susceptible to being held up and idolized as something that stands between Christ and our following of him.

Whether we can agree with him or not, at the very least Craddock's understanding of the radical nature of this passage calls us to examine the areas of our lives that thwart us from following Christ's call to unconditional discipleship.

Why, why does discipleship have to be unconditional? Why are disciples not able to pick and choose how and when they would like to follow? Why not have our cake and eat it too?

Perhaps because 16,000 children will die today from malnourishment. And we as a global economy for first time in history have the power to stop it. “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God...”

Why?

Perhaps because 80% of those who moved into a FEMA trailer after hurricane Katrina still live in that FEMA trailer almost two years later.

Why?

Perhaps because we still need to build 50 houses a day for the next ten years to bring the Gulf-coast back to the way it was before Katrina.

Why unconditional discipleship?

Perhaps, because there are people in our midst who so desperately need to know and experience the love of God in our lives.

Why?

Because there are people so wounded by the tragedies of their lives that all they can see is a God who has forsaken them.

Why?

Because we are faced with, a number of environmental crises that will leave our planet scared for generations to come.

The list could go on indefinitely

I would like to tell you about a young girl named Cassie. Cassie was only 17 years old when she died. She was one of twelve students who was shot and killed at Columbine High School. Cassie was in the library when approached by the Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris. Eyewitness overheard an exchange between her and one of the gunmen. She was asked, "Do you believe in God?" To which this young woman answered "yes." Moments later, she was shot dead.

Cassie died as she lived an unconditional disciple of Christ. She gave everything she had to follow Christ including her physical life, she didn't look back or turn, she plowed ahead and with a gun planted in her face, Christ asked her to follow and she said yes without reservation or excuse

Fortunately most of us will probably never be faced with a question of that magnitude and I will be the first one to stand here to say I'm not sure what I would have done in that moment. I can only hope that I would have the courage and fortitude to yes regardless of the consequences.

That moment that Cassie said yes to her faith was forged not in that moment, but in her walk as a disciple, as a follower of Christ.

That moment was forged in the many moments before when Cassie reached out to those in need. That moment was forged in the moments when Cassie quietly prayed, when she picked up her bible and listened for the still small voice of God that comes each and every time we encounter scripture.

Cassie's decision in her final moment was forged in the countless number of times someone else came along side to let her know that she was God's beloved.

And if no one has ever told you that right now let me say to you, you are God's beloved.

May each of this day pray for the fortitude to say yes, when Christ comes and asks us to follow him.

Whether that be following him to Gulfport Mississippi, whether that be to pick up a sponge, to wash a car for mission, whether that be to put your arm around someone who needs a hug, or whether that be to say "yes" when faced with a question and the barrel of a gun.

AMEN