



St John Lutheran Church

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Luke 9:51-62

"Who Do You Say You Are?"

"Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, 'Lord, 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.' Then He said to another, 'Follow Me.' But he said, 'Lord, let me first go and bury my father.' Jesus said to him, 'Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God.' And another also said, 'Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house.' But Jesus said to him, 'No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.'

Last week the question posed to us from God's Word was "who do you say Jesus is?" The question no doubt caused you to think about Jesus and what it is that you personally believe... what it is that you personally say, or confess, about Him. You contemplated the question knowing full well that eternity waited in the balance for an answer. Scripture testifies to the fact that there is salvation, the forgiveness of sins, hope and the promise of eternal life only in the confession of Jesus as the Christ of God... the God/Man come into the world to give His life as ransom for the sins of the world. That is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. To confess the Name of Jesus then is to confess the Gospel.

Indeed, as St. Luke later reminds us while quoting Peter, "there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." And as St. Paul would go on to say in his great confession of Jesus to the Christians at Philippi, "God has highly exalted (Jesus) and given Him the Name which is above every name, that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the Glory of God the Father."

"Who do you say Jesus is?" That was the question before us last week... this morning our focus shifts just a bit as we consider yet another question from God's Word, namely, "who do you say you are?" The answer to this question varies greatly among people... even as the answers to the question of who Jesus is vary greatly. For instance, some would say, "I am a product of the evolutionary process, my traits, both good and bad, being handed down to me through the random ordering of the gene pool." Others would say, "I am a surprise - at least that is what my parents told me!" And still others would say "I don't know who I am or why I am here. I only hope that I figure it all out though before I get to the end and my gravestone is marked with my name, my years of life, and the single word "confused."

"Who do you say you are?" Most people identify themselves by what they do in life. Ask most people who they are and the response you will most likely get is that I am...a school teacher...a rancher...a logger...a trucker...doctor...lawyer...nurse...plumber ... carpenter...or any number of a whole host of possible occupations that people fill to make their way in this world.

Even within Christian circles there is some confusion as to what we should say about ourselves as God's people. It has become increasingly popular to make an artificial distinction between 'Christians'... meaning Who Do You Say You Are?

the run of mill person who believes in Christ... **those who come** to God's house of worship each week to receive His Grace in/with/and under bread and wine... **and then compare this "simple Christian to one who claims to be ..."**in the Word and 'Disciples' of Jesus." As if being a 'disciple' of Jesus is one committed to following Him... **whatever that** might entail... **while an** ordinary 'Christian' is content to sit on the sidelines and let it all happen.

There are even classes now taught in some Churches where specific "discipling classes" are taught. **The intent of** such teaching is meant for good...**but it** is totally works oriented and it evokes division and a class warfare...**it forces an artificial** distinction that have been set up within Christian circles as to who is 'merely a Christian' and who is "really" a **true 'disciple of Jesus.'**

The fact is, all who are baptized into Christ Jesus... **all Christians** are disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ. **Having been cleansed** of sin and created anew in Christ... **a disciple** finds his life **only in Christ... even as** St. Paul said, "**it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me.**" **A disciple** is one who simply cannot live apart from repentance, forgiveness, and the tender voice of God found in His Word and given by His Son! **A disciple** is one who answers the question "**who am I**" with a confession of "**who Christ is.**" **I am a child of the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last, the Lamb slain for the sins of the world.**

I should mention here that a literal translation of the Greek word for disciple means one who follows or one who learns. **This then is** what a disciple is characterized to be as Scripture uses the word..

Luke reports to us that three different men approached Jesus expressing a desire to follow Him. **We know that** these men were already believers, disciples of Jesus... **because, as** Jesus says elsewhere... **no one follows Him,** in terms of becoming His disciple, **by their own choosing. Remember, He said, "you did not choose Me, but I chose you."** **This is critical** to understand as so many Churches these days teach that you can choose Jesus...**which would** mean that, on our own... **without God's help or influence we have the spiritual insight to decide for Jesus. This is clearly false teaching. God chooses us because without Him we are spiritually dead... and dead** people can "decide" nothing...**nor can** they do anything for themselves.

So, these three believers...these disciples, approached Jesus and were reminded **that there is a cost to following Him. The first man** was perhaps much like Simon Peter, in terms of his enthusiasm. **He said to** Jesus, "**Lord, I will follow You wherever You go.**" **To which** Jesus said, "**Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.**" **This disciple** receives really the same caution that Jesus gave in the parable of the sower. **Remember, He said, "Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them."** Which means, as Jesus later went on to explain, "**he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the Word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the Word, and he becomes unfruitful.**"

And so, as Jesus' disciples we are to count the cost of following Him. **Life can be** exceedingly difficult and we are not to assume that because we follow Jesus all of life's struggles will be taken away in an instant. **In fact, it** may be the case that in following Him trials will intensify. **The model** is in Jesus, the Son of Man, **who literally had no place to lay His head. And yet... by God's Grace,** along with Simon Peter we say, "**Lord, to whom shall we go, You have the words of eternal life.**"

The second and third men who approach Jesus receive responses from Him that are perhaps the most disturbing to us. **The second person** wanted to go and bury his father before he followed Jesus to which Jesus said, "**Let the dead bury their own dead.**" **Meaning, let the spiritually dead** bury their own. **Likewise, the**

third person wanted to go and say good-bye to his family and friends, to which Jesus said, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God."

What did Jesus mean by these things? Well, it is not that burying the dead is unimportant... or that honoring family is unimportant. God establishes the importance of both of those things elsewhere in Scripture. But here it is a matter of the First Commandment ... having nothing in life above God.

As disciples of Jesus nothing is ultimately to come before our loyalty to Him. While that sounds awfully Law or command oriented... St. Paul couched it in the Gospel and he put it like this... "I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

As Christ has loved you ...so you now are moved to love Him and to order your life according to His good and perfect Will. Your love for Him won't be perfect... as is His love for you... but by His Grace His Love will move you to abhor what He abhors and to love what He loves. This is what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. This is Gospel...our life is in Christ and without Him we simply wither and die...just as we wither and die if we cannot breathe.

And so, "who do you say you are?" Baptized into Christ you stand here today as one redeemed by Christ the Crucified. You bask today in a shower of forgiveness because the blood of forgiveness flowed... indeed it flows... from your Master... from your Lord... from your Savior...from your Life!

Moved by His great Love you have been called to follow Him and to count the cost. And any cost we suffer for being a Christian...for being a Disciple of Christ pales when the price that He paid to count you His own enters the picture. Jesus suffered the most horrendous death so that He can give you Life. He enters your life here on earth ...and He makes you His own through baptism and gives you the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. He continues to come to you through His Word and His Holy Sacraments. He gathers you here to give you these special and Divine Gifts. This... so that you will know who you are and where you are going. This... so that He can give His absolute confidence that you are saved...that you are His own...that no one ...or nothing in this world can pluck you out of His Almighty and Holy hands. You are now the Holy Ones of God...His children and heirs to all that Christ has earned for you! This is who you are!!!

In the Name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit... Amen.

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