

***Luke 9:62 No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.***

How closely did you follow the Prayer of the Day this morning? Did you pray it and then look for the connections in the Scripture readings and the theme for today? As a worship planner, those connections are part and parcel to the work, but as a worshipper, we easily miss them in the rote and rhythm of a typical Sunday morning.

In years past, there was even a little bit of built-in excuse to miss those careful connections. New Life is a liturgical church. That means that, like the worship gatherings in the Old Testament, like the synagogue gatherings in which Jesus participated, indeed, like the worship of the New Testament age, we worship in a way that features the message of the gospel through weekly, seasonal, and annual proclamation of the life of Christ.

With roots going back to the synagogue worship in which Jesus participated, there is what we know as the Prayer of the Day. These prayers have been crafted, sometimes centuries ago, to reflect the readings of Scripture designated for specific Sundays and festivals throughout the Church Year.

(On a quick sidenote, you may have heard the terms *lectionary* and *pericope*. Pericope means literally, a cutting. So, think of Scripture readings for the day as the “cuttings” from Scripture chosen for that Sunday or Festival. The *lectionary* is the *collection* of these “cuttings,” or pericopes.)

For well more than a thousand years of New Testament age worship, typical lectionaries consisted of one annual cycle based on the life of Christ. Each Sunday and festival had a Prayer of the Day connected to it, reflecting the selected, or cut, readings from Scripture.

But over time, people realized that there were even more sections of Scripture that needed to be put before the congregation on a regular basis. And so multiple-year lectionaries were created, like the 3-year cycle we make use of today.

And while the readings were expanded into three years, the Prayers of the Day largely remained an annual series of prayers, with the result that they weren’t as closely tied to readings. *Christian Worship* ’21 resources, however, have rectified the situation. Now, the Prayers of the Day more closely reflect the selected readings and themes.

That’s a long way to go, I know, but now, think about the readings for today: Elisha’s sacrifice as he is called to succeed Elijah as prophet of Israel, Paul’s level of commitment to the proclamation of the Gospel, and Jesus connecting the rigors of discipleship with his own “determination” to go to Jerusalem for your salvation and mine... *O God, you have prepared joys beyond understanding for those who love you. Pour into our hearts such love for you that, loving you above all things, we may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.*

*Such love for you.* Obviously, that works on two levels, such love that God has for you, and in thanksgiving, we pray for such love in return for him. Just look at how the section starts out: ***When the days were approaching for him to be taken up, Jesus was determined to go to Jerusalem.*** Literally, ***set his face to go to Jerusalem.*** In other words, nothing was going to keep him from doing what he came to do – bring about salvation.

This section is the turning point in Luke’s account. The Transfiguration has just taken place. The disciples had been given a glimpse of glory to buoy them up in the days ahead – a taste of the *joys beyond*

*understanding* in our Prayer of the Day. Now, as they travel towards Jerusalem, Jesus sends messengers ahead of him into the Samaritan towns and villages through which they were travelling, but were met with anger and rejection.

James and John want to call down fire from heaven, like Elijah did in the days of Ahab and Jezebel. ***But he turned and rebuked them. “You don’t know what kind of spirit is influencing you. <sup>56</sup> For the Son of Man did not come to destroy people’s souls, but to save them.”***

You see, that’s where discipleship starts – saved souls. It is only when we are brought to know Jesus by faith, when our eyes are opened to our need for a savior, when our hearts are cut with contrition and repentance, when they are washed by the grace of forgiveness in the waters of baptism, when you are empowered with thanksgiving for Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, when your very life is set ablaze with the Holy Spirit’s fire, when in the very depth of your soul you know that the Lord had, and continues to have, *such love for you*, that you can gratefully, confidently, passionately pray, *Pour into our hearts such love for you*.

Because, lets be honest, this whole discipleship thing isn’t going to be easy. This is 1<sup>st</sup> commandment stuff. Salvation is free from Jesus – it cost him everything, yet it is a *gift* for you. As a result, you have this desire to give all for him as he gave all for you, as you long to have *such love* for him as he has for you...this kind of true discipleship...will cost you everything.

Just look at the people in our text for today who had a desire to follow Jesus. It was the cost of discipleship with which they struggled. In each case, these potential followers came to Jesus with a big fat “but” in their commitment. “I will follow you...but...” And in each case Jesus challenged their priorities. Again, this is 1<sup>st</sup> commandment stuff. Is God truly first?

What is the big fat “but” in your life? (And yes, I know my phraseology is potentially offensive – but that’s kind of the point, isn’t it?) I will follow you, Lord... but... I will follow you, Lord, but... only if I can hold on to bitterness and resentment. I will follow you, Lord, but... only as long as others do their fair share, too. I will follow you, Lord, but... only if I can, every once in a while, still put me first. I will follow you, Lord, but... only if you give me a little more heaven on earth right now. I will follow you, Lord, but... only if we’re singing the hymns I like, but...only if I’m more successful at work, but...only if I’m healed, but...only if...only if...

*Pour into our hearts such love for you that, loving you above all things, we may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire.*

Here’s the promise, in losing yourself, you discover yourself. In making yourself nothing, you become something. When we align with Christ, we will find a spiritually rich and eternally glorious life. In effect, Jesus says, think differently – no longer focusing on what we get now, focus on what is to come through the forgiveness and new life that is ours, now, through Christ – a life showered in grace, meeting the Lord’s unconditional demand by offering your whole heart – not just some, not just most – your whole heart as you follow him; a life committed to him because of his commitment to you, in full confidence that it will never be in vain.

A few minutes ago, we read the words from verse 51 ***when the days were approaching***. Literally, *when the days were filling up*. I know it might seem this way sometimes, but the life of discipleship is not an emptying out. No, the life of a disciples of Jesus, a follower of Christ, is a filling up each day towards a glorious destination. The one calling you to follow him knows the path and invites you to follow with the guarantee that it will be good. Don’t look back, just ***Plow*** away! Amen.