

Are We Still Interested?

Luke 9: 57-62

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 plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

Movie Clip from Star Wars III: Return of the Sith

[Yoda speaking to Anakin Skywalker]

Yoda: Premonitions? Hmm. What are these visions you have?

Anakin: They are of pain, suffering...death.

Yoda: Yourself you speak of, or someone you know?

Anakin: Someone...

Yoda: Close to you?

Anakin: Yes.

Yoda: Careful you must be when sensing the future, Anakin. The fear of loss is a path to the dark side.

Anakin: I won't let these visions come true, Master Yoda.

Yoda: Death is a natural part of life. Rejoice for those who have been transformed into the force. Mourn them do not. Miss them do not. Attachment leads to jealousy. The shadow of greed, that is.

Anakin: What must I do, Master Yoda?

Yoda: Train yourself to let go of everything you fear to lose.

Yoda. Jedi master. Wise. Well versed in the force, he is. As he coaches his padawan he says, “Train yourself to let go of everything you fear to lose.” Fear of loss, he says, is a path to the dark side. A tough lesson, it is. Yet, we hear Jesus giving his wannabe disciples a tough lesson too. As he sets his face toward Jerusalem—toward the cross—he tells his would-be padawans that if they wish to follow him, they must detach from the things they fear to lose as well. Their legal obligations to take care of their father. The regret they might have of leaving their family systems. Even having a roof over their head. “Whoever puts a hand to the plow and looks back is not fit for the kingdom of God,” he says. A tough lesson, it is. Who is still interested?

As we begin, we admit Jesus' words sound rough. “If you aren't willing to leave your attachments behind, you aren't fit for the kingdom.” Is he really trying to convince us *not* to follow him? After all, we are well-intentioned people who must adhere to our obligations. We have our responsibilities. We have our attachments. This week I was thinking that if Jesus

knocked on the door and said, “Let’s go!” I’d probably respond, “Sure! I’ll catch up once the sermon is written.” Or, “I’ll tag along once I get through raising the kids.” Or, “Check back with me after I retire.” Or, “At least let me grab my morning coffee first!” As I search myself, the truth is there are things I am more attached to than following Jesus. Perhaps it’s true for most of us. We are attached to our political ideologies so much so, that we have convinced ourselves that Jesus was only about spiritual matters. We might find we are attached to how people perceive us—it’s why so many stay silent when an injustice occurs. We are attached to our way of life—with three square meals, a roof and a bed—and plenty more! So what do we do when Jesus challenges our priorities by saying if we can’t leave our attachments behind we aren’t fit for the kingdom? Is Jesus really trying to convince us *not* to follow him?

But hold on a minute. Maybe Jesus isn’t denying anyone at all. As his face is turned toward Jerusalem, eyeing the cross, perhaps he is simply offering a reality check: “If you sign up for this life, here’s what you can expect.” There is a price tag to discipleship. There will be times when we will experience disruption, and it will be holy. There might be times when we will experience rejection like he does. The reality is following Jesus is not an easy life. When I was in middle school, in health class they gave us a pretend baby doll to take care of over the weekend. Some of you may have had a five-pound bag of flour or sugar wrapped in a blanket. My generation had plastic baby dolls who would make sounds at random times during the day. As the caregiver, we had to figure out if it was crying because it was hungry, or if it had a wet diaper, or it needed held for attention. Over the weekend the baby would often wake up in the middle of night, where we would have to feed it or change its diapers while half asleep. On Monday morning, with bloodshot eyes we would say, “Here take this thing back!” It was a tough lesson. We’d have the jolting disruption of reorienting our lives around taking care of a baby. Perhaps Jesus is doing the same thing. He is laying out the reality of building a life around the kingdom of God. It’s not easy. If we follow Jesus, here is what we can expect.

Now the question of the hour: Are we still interested? After all, the call is still there and as we follow, we will be asked to let go of our attachment of what that means. As some of you know, my in-laws bought a historic home in Detroit. The place has seven bedrooms. They bought it for a song with the dream of housing people who don’t have a place to rest their heads. Recently a Congolese refugee from the Republic of Congo has been living with them. The thing is, he also has a family back home who he needs to send money to, so he needs a job. Then once he found a job he needed a car to get to work, so they found him a car. Once he found a car he needed car insurance to drive legally, so they helped him pay his bill. When the car wouldn’t start, they bought him a new car battery. My father-in-law says that part of him wants to say, “I signed up for putting a roof over his head, not all this other stuff!” But he knows: It’s part of the price tag of following Jesus.

If we are looking for a God who will respect our priorities;
who will honor our social calendars;
who will keep our spiritual lives neat and orderly;
Jesus isn’t it.

But if we are looking for a God who will open our eyes to what truly matters;
who will offer us life and purpose until our last days and final breaths;
who will empower us with the spiritual wherewithal to keep moving our feet forward for the
sake of God's kingdom here and now,
well...that is a different story.

You know, the bible never says if the wannabe disciples ever end up following Jesus or if they
walk away. The story leaves it open ended for us to decide. Are we still interested? That is the
question every church and every disciple must answer for themselves.