

Proper 8, Yr. C: Follow

1 Kings 19:15-16, 1921; Galatians 5:1, 13-25; Luke 9:51-62

The Reverend Paul D. Allick, The Church of the Advent, June 30, 2019

It is a story as old as the Bible. God invites humanity into a covenantal relationship and the people stray.

From Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit, to the Golden Calf in the desert, to the settled people begging for a king when God was already their just and merciful king. We just can't keep the relationship intact. We always want it our way, something more, something bigger, better and faster.

As the Psalmist laments in Psalm 16, "Protect me, O God, for I take refuge in you; I have said to the Lord, "You are my Lord, my good above all other. But those who run after other gods shall have their troubles multiplied."

We heard in the Gospel according to Luke Chapter nine that Jesus has set his face toward Jerusalem. His exodus to the cross has begun. All the way through to chapter nineteen will be the story of how his disciples and others along the way take the journey with him.

The first seeker tells Jesus that he will follow him wherever he goes. Jesus retorts, "Oh, really? I don't even have a place to sleep."

Jesus says to another, "Follow me." The seeker replies, "Sure but first let me stay behind so I can be here when my father needs to be buried. It's my obligation." Jesus retorts, "Break free from those social expectations. Let the dead sentiments deal with themselves. Something new has arrived. Let's go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

Another says, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." Jesus said to him, "Unless you can drop what you are doing in an instant and follow me you will never understand the Kingdom."

What Jesus is preaching is something dynamic and urgent. There is no time to doddle with former expectations, sentimentality, or skepticism. As we hear at the beginning of the Gospel according to Mark, after Jesus is baptized the heavens are torn open! Take heed! God has arrived on earth as in heaven.

Now. Now is the Day of Salvation. Now is the day to start the mission to reconcile all people with God and each other in Name of Jesus Christ. Now is your day of decision. Who will you serve?

Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer was executed by the Nazi government for resisting the regime and calling out the state church's compliances with it. He was part of what was called the Confessing Church.

His most famous book is called the *Cost of Discipleship*. Pastor Bonhoeffer writes, "Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate...Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock...It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life...'ye were bought at a price,' and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us."

In our opening prayer we remembered that God has built the Church upon the foundation of the Prophets and Apostles and Jesus is the chief cornerstone. We asked God to help us to be joined together in the unity of spirit by their teaching so that we would become a holy temple acceptable to God.

Each generation of the Church must ask themselves. Is that our foundation or is it something else? Are we making idols out of liturgy? Politics? Theological Fads? Busy Schedules? Self-gratifying pursuits?

Two stores to close with. They come from other faith traditions.

My Grandfather Bunageebe was a Muslim immigrant from Lebanon to North Dakota in the 1920's. My father told me that he would often go outside and lay his prayer rug right on the snow, face east and say his prayers. I think of him when I try to rationalize not saying the daily prayers proscribed for us in the Book of Common Prayer.

At my last parish an Orthodox Synagogue rented space from us. One day I met a new family. They had just moved to the Midwest from the East Coast. They were a young family with several children. They had come for a job for the husband, but the wife also needed to find one. She had recently been offered a dream job. But she had told them she could not start when they wanted. She hoped they could reschedule because it was an important Holy Day. She would not skip it for a job.

Will you follow Jesus? Do you have the time, or are there other more pressing matters?