



FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

“A DIFFERENT KIND OF KING”

Scripture Lessons: Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Luke 9:57-62

This sermon was preached by Dr. L. Holton Siegling, Jr. on Sunday, November 21, 2021 at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.

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 plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.’

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

Let us pray...

Almighty and everlasting God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts, be pleasing and even joyful in your sight. For you are our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

When we think of a king, what comes to our minds? A golden crown adorned with fanciful jewels? A royal diadem, that ornate headpiece about which we sang about this morning. Perhaps we envision a long flowing velvet cape or a magnificent scepter? Does that sound like Jesus? Not really! Of course, near the end of his life Jesus would, in fact, wear a royal colored garment as well as a crown, but that particular garment would be one of ridicule and the crown would be made of thorns. No! For all divine intents and purposes, Jesus wore the kinds of clothes that ordinary people would wear, which is to say that if Jesus were walking down Meeting Street this morning, he probably wouldn’t be donning the most expensive suit in the world. He might not even be in a blue blazer and khakis. Truth is, we don’t know what Jesus would wear. What we do know is that we would be able to see it and the reason we would be able to see it is because, unlike other kings, Jesus would dwell, not in a palace, but among people. Come to think of it, the only palace I recall Jesus ever being in was Pontius Pilate’s headquarters, which was a palace, but Jesus was only there just long enough to say: “My kingdom is not from this world.”

Ah, his would forever be more humble surroundings; indeed, from the beginning of his life, and when he was placed in a manger, to the end of his life, and when he was placed in a rich man’s tomb, it was clear that Jesus’ testimony, about which we read this morning, it was true, “the Son of Man ha[d] nowhere to lay his head.” And perhaps that’s a good thing, because it means that our Savior is not enshrined in some mausoleum and his epitaph, the one that which: “He is not here. He is risen as he said,” we will not find that on any headstone. What I am trying to say is that just as Jesus dwelled among us then, he dwells among us now; granted, he dwells in our hearts, in that blessed sanctification of the human soul! In this way, Jesus is not a haughty or an

arrogant King, unattainable, unapproachable. Our King is not about the business of barking out orders from some heavenly throne. No! Our King chose to usher forth his kingdom not from a distance, but from very nearby and the manner in which he dwelt came by way of seeking and saving the lost, washing our feet, feeding us with loaves and fish, grabbing the dirt of the earth and spitting upon it and giving us sight. And thanks be to God he did, because we were lost and dirty and hungry and blind! In so many ways, we still are and we are also torn! We are torn because we do not typically yield to much of anything; we are not predisposed to think of others first and ourselves last; and neither are we all that inclined to lose our life for Jesus' sake and yet that is precisely the message of our King. But this is nothing new! To be certain, Jesus has always been honest with us. He has told us as plain as day that following him will not always be easy. Oh, at times I suspect that our following may feel something akin to a bundle of joy on a Silent Night; however, at other times, it may more closely resemble Good Friday. It may feel an awful lot like taking up a cross. But lest we forget, Jesus never asked us to do anything that he wasn't willing to do himself. In this morning's New Testament Lesson, for example, Jesus has set his face toward Jerusalem, and he knows exactly what awaits him in that Holy City. He knows that within the span of a week the showering of "Hosannas" will give way to that terrible refrain: "Crucify him!"

Along the way, Jesus encounters three would-be followers and in their life and in their response, we are given some sense of what it means for us to be not only faithful followers of Jesus, but also loyal subjects to our King. The first one says to Jesus very enthusiastically: "I will follow you wherever you go." Now, surely that that must have been music to Jesus' ears. I know it would be music to most any pastor's ears. We often find ourselves in the blessed position of observing firsthand the outward enthusiasm of people who wish to join the church and we delight in the particular ways that they become active and engaged in its life and ministry. In fact, few things are more exciting to see than a person yielding to God and fruitfully living out their life within the community of faith! That's the kind of person to whom we are first introduced here. He's ready to follow, ready to go, but listen again to what Jesus says: "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." In other words, if you follow me, there is not going to be any security. You are not going to be able to control the future, and you may not even have a place to call home. Ah, make no mistake about it, as we gather in this place, there is no threat. The religious freedom that those first pilgrims sought. Ah, thanks to their work and the work of those that followed, we don't have to worry about religious persecution, at least not in this country.

For many years, I followed a missionary in another part of the world whose name we were never permitted to publish, because if the authorities in the area where he and his family served ever learned of his Christian witness, that missionary partner could have been killed. Friends, there are many in the world today for whom such a reality is both sad and true, following Jesus can cost everything and that is something Jesus wanted this first person to understand, it is something Jesus wants us to understand. Now, the second would-be follower of Jesus, he is not a volunteer like the first. What I mean is, he's not out there taking the initiative and coming up to Jesus and expressing a willingness to follow. He could have been minding his own business for all we know. Nevertheless, Jesus says to him the same thing he has said to every person who has

been born since that time: "Follow me." And it seems he really wanted to follow Jesus, but he has some pressing matters to which he needed to attend. "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." I would add that some scholars question where this man's father was actually dead or perhaps merely dying and needed to be looked after. Regardless, this second would-be follower of Jesus, he makes what seems to be an altogether reasonable request. I come back to our pastoral perspective, because this is something that we experience all the time! There are always needs that exist and opportunities to serve, but now may not always be the right time. We all say things like, "my work and school, it is all consuming and I'm just too tired, but things should let up soon! Definitely after this project or after the break or once COVID dies down, then I'll be able to invest myself more fully!" All good excuses, every single one and, mind you, those are excuses that we as pastors honor every single time. But listen again to what Jesus said, "Let the dead bury their own dead."

The third would-be follower of Jesus, he faced a similar dilemma to that of the second, and while he too indicates that he will follow, he adds: "But first let me say farewell to those at my home." And, here again, that sounds like a perfectly reasonable response! I mean, it takes time to get one's house in order, we all know that, but listen again to what Jesus says: "No one puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of heaven." At the very least, it is good to know that Jesus does not try to confuse us? Jesus doesn't sign us up and then surprise us with unexpected demands. The cost of discipleship is clearly posted throughout the pages of scripture and the message contained therein couldn't be more clear, following Jesus is more important than anything! In fact, when we love God in the way we ought to love God, then all of our other loves, they will pale in comparison! That's the point Jesus is making here! He's not telling us to leave our enthusiasm at the door, our dead on the streets, and our family in the dust. No! Jesus spent far too much time telling us about the joys of life and living for that to be the case, talked too much about our individual and corporate and familial responsibilities, emphasized far too frequently the importance of loving and serving others!

The issue here is about understanding what it means to truly love the Lord our God with all of our heart and soul and mind and strength and while God wants us to approach His throne of grace with a measure of joy and enthusiasm, God also wants us to come to Him with eyes wide open! With eyes that see and ears that hear so that, when push comes to shove and when faced with the loving claims of the Gospel, we would stop whatever it is that we are doing and follow! And follow, not just in terms of a daily decision, though it is that as well. I mean, by now, we should know that Jesus' point is not about refraining from burying our dead or saying goodbye to those we love, it is about a life decision, a permanent and lasting decision to obey our King, and to render unto him all that we have and all that we are, which just so happens to influence every other decision we make. Oh, so important was it for Jesus that we experience life and life abundant, that he chose not to reside in heaven while we remained buried under the consequences of our sins. No, ours is a far different kind of King than that. For ours loved us enough to subject himself to death, even death on a cross! That's the King we serve! The one who gave his life as a ransom for many and for all who would be his loyal subjects, the requirement is clear, no matter what, in spite of anything, and for the joy of everything, "Follow me.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*The following sermon has not been edited by the author; therefore, there may be discrepancies. When in doubt please refer to the audio version of the sermon on this website.