



THE NEW SHOFAR

Not everybody who says "Lord! Lord! Will find entry into the Kingdom of God

June 26th

At this point in the Gospel, Luke highlights the ministry of discipleship, trying to illustrate the challenges coming the way of all those who strive to follow Jesus and live their lives under the reign of God. Jesus is conscious of his own approaching conflict with the Jewish leaders and the very real possibility of that conflict bringing an end to his life.

But he turned and resolutely...

The stress for the evangelist here is on that word *resolutely*. Jesus set his face resolutely and headed for Jerusalem. He is aware of what awaits him. He knows the opposition and hatred is there and is growing but his focus remains on what it is his Father wants him to be doing. He can cope with everything coming his way while obedience and service dominate his decision making. With his focus on God, he remains confident that *all things will, in the end, turn out for the good*.

Or to put it another way, what Jesus espouses here is how *distracted discipleship* will not suffice. By this stage in their ministry, the disciples should be ready to make up their minds – is Jesus the One they want to follow as their Lord and Saviour? If that is the case, then nothing else can matter. As with Elijah in the first reading, obedience to God's saving work in the world must be the foundation of all else they do.

The Samaritan experience is about more than Samaritans

Their experience in this town makes up our first lesson about distracted discipling—especially underscoring how easy it is to let other realms of daily life creep in. The Jews and the Samaritans hated each other, and neither would expect a warm welcome in the villages of the others. When John and James ask Jesus if they should call down some vengeful judgement on the town that has rejected them, their motives were not purely holy. It was their national identity as Jews shaped how they wanted to be disciples. They wanted to be Jews when it came to dealing with the Samaritans and Jesus' disciples when they were among fellow Jews.

What Jesus is trying to teach them is that their discipleship was to shape everything else, that Jesus was to be the lens through which they saw everything and everyone. They were Discipled Jews and not Jews who were sometimes disciples.

If James and John had been less distracted by their national biases—aka their national discipleship—then they would have been able to follow the example of their rabbi and remember what he has already taught them in word and deed: by making a Samaritan woman an evangelist (**John 4**) Jesus has shown that he does not hate this people group;

nor has Jesus ever spoken hatred or immediate judgement and wrath on any human being(s) for rejecting him—he has left the judgement to his Father.

The immediate is always a challenge to the future in Christ

When something challenging or unsettling comes our way, when we are faced with all kinds of challenges and difficulties it is easy to allow those things to fill our thoughts and to control our decisions. When someone says something or does something we find “offends” us, that moment can be what dominates our responses. Unchecked, it can go on to become an issue between God and ourselves, reach the point where love no longer defines who we are. The future, the eternal is lost to that moment when we no longer place God between us and the “other”.

How easy is that? We find it all but impossible to let this “thing” go and before long our spiritual life to this moment is in danger of being overwhelmed. We are distracted from what God expects, unable to see and follow the call and example of Jesus and close to abandoning the blessings that flow from living in God’s Kingdom. How much easier it would have been for them to see that “thing” that throws them off balance through the eyes of Jesus’ call to be a disciple. What would Jesus do?

Mostly it is the little things that throw us off

As Jesus continues back along the road to Jerusalem, he calls many people and as this short readings illustrates, there were lots of people willing to follow. Sadly, their lives were bogged down in the “immediate” of their lives. They want to be disciples, know it is important, but find there are other more pressing things in their lives at that time. Some of them are significant – a funeral, others seem important – saying goodbye to family and friends. Let me get my house first, my career, my super ready for retirement, the list could go on and on. There is just little room for true discipleship.

Jesus is not saying these things are unimportant. What he is saying is how these things turn out much better for us when they are built on a foundation of discipleship. When we live in Christ; when our daily focus is on doing the will of God, collaborating with his divine mission to bring salvation to all, these things bring a sense of fulfilment, peace and joy that is all but impossible without him.

Choosing Jesus does not mean turning our backs on the world. Nor does it mean we can pretend that the real difficulties of living in our modern world are unimportant. Jesus talks of living as disciples in the real world, in whatever circumstances we find ourselves living. Being a disciple brings light and life to our humanity, to our living and being in a very human world. He is reassuring them that discipleship transforms everything we do as humans, bringing grace alive and active in places we did not even think God was interested in.

Sadly, in the light of God’s greater plan, it is generally the petty, the inter-personal conflicts that have our noses out of joint that threaten our discipleship the most. Most indelicately, Jesus is rebuking us, telling us to “build a bridge” and get over these things, keep moving. Discipleship is Christ first and Christ last with Christ flavouring all that is in between or what we have is not Christian discipleship.