

Jesus is calling: “Come and follow me”

Message for Palm Sunday, March 25, 2018
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Luke 9:23

Children’s Message: from Matthew 21:1-10

There was a great celebration when Jesus came to town. They had a big parade in his honour. People cut branches from the trees and made the road into a carpet for him. Some even put their coats down on the road as part of that carpet. They were singing and shouting and praising God, all because Jesus was coming to town.

People had all kinds of plans for Jesus. *Use a puppet to illustrate how they thought Jesus would act.* Many of them were glad because Jesus was going to be their new king. They hated the old king, Herod, because he was so mean to everyone.

Many of them were excited because they thought Jesus was going to lead a revolution and drive out their enemies who had taken over the country.

Some were there because they had heard that Jesus healed a lot of sick people, and they wanted to be cured of their sickness.

People had all kinds of plans for Jesus. Jesus was the only one who knew the real reason he had come to town. He came there to die, to give his life on the cross. *Lay the puppet on a cross.* He gave his life for us. Jesus loves us that much.

Message: Jesus is calling: “Come and follow me” Have you ever noticed some ads by car dealers, how they put the price for monthly payments in big, bold, bright red letters, but the actual price is much smaller? They do that because “\$299” sounds a lot better than “\$29,000”!

Then there are ads for things which don’t give the price at all. They just describe how wonderful their product is, and give you the 800 number to phone and place your order. And when you phone, you have to listen to a long spiel about how wonderful it is, and about how it will change your life for the better, before they tell you the price.

These are common tactics among sales people who are afraid of scaring off their prospective customers before they’ve had a chance to hear the pitch.

I’m not going to do that. I’m going to tell you the deal right up front. I’m not hiding anything. There’s no small print.

The deal is very simple. As I said to the children, we thank Jesus for giving his life for us on the cross, and we give our lives to Jesus. We belong to him.

I’m going to pass on to you the invitation which Jesus gives to those who want to become his disciples, which simply means his followers.

Luke 9:23, Today’s English Version:

[Jesus said], “If you want to come with me, you must forget yourself, take up your cross every day, and follow me.

In that passage Jesus lists three things:

-) Forget yourself. In other words, we deny our selves: our self-centredness, our desires to always have more, to be number one, to be liked.
-) Take up your cross daily. In other words, start each day by committing your life to Jesus Christ. If and when you suffer persecution or hardship because of your obedience to Jesus, accept that as part of the deal.
-) Follow him. In other words, follow the leader. Jesus becomes Number One in our lives; he is Lord over everything. Our priorities change, the way we spend our time and our money change.

To me, in a nutshell, that’s what it means to be a Christian. Jesus died for us; we live for him.

Some people like the first part of that deal (“Jesus died for me”), but they don’t like the second part (“we live for him”).

William Willimon, a chaplain at Duke University in the US, tells of receiving a phone call one day from a very irate father. The man was angry because his graduate school-bound daughter had decided to (in his words) “throw it all away and go and do mission work in Haiti with the Presbyterian Church.”

The father screamed, “Isn’t that absurd! She has a B.Sc. degree from Duke, and she is going to dig ditches in Haiti! I hold you personally responsible for this!” Willimon said, “Why me?” The father said, “You ingratiated yourself and filled her mind with all this religion stuff.”

Will Willimon is not easily intimidated. He asked the father: “Sir, weren’t you the one who had her baptized?”

“Well, well, well, yes.”

“And didn’t you take her to Sunday School when she was a little girl?”

“Well, well, yes.”

“And didn’t you allow your daughter to go on those youth group ski trips to Colorado when she was in high school?”

“Yes . . . what does that have to do with anything?”

“Sir, you’re the reason she’s throwing it all away. You introduced her to Jesus. Not me!”

“But,” moaned the father, “all we wanted was a good Presbyterian.”

Willimon replied, “Well, sorry, sir, you messed up. You’ve gone and made her into a disciple of Jesus!”

Yes, my friends, Jesus is calling us to be more than simply Presbyterians (or United Church goers, or whatever). He wants our lives, and nothing less.

An African pastor was overpowered by rebels who demanded that he renounce his faith. He refused. The night before the rebels took his life, the pastor wrote the following lines on a scrap of paper:

I am part of the “Fellowship of the Unashamed.” I have Holy Spirit power. The die has been cast. I’ve stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I am a disciple of His. I won’t look back, let up, slow down, back away, or be still. My past is redeemed, my present makes sense, and my future is secure. I am finished and done with low living, sight walking, small planning, smooth knees, colourless dreams, tame visions, mundane talking, chintzy giving, and dwarfed goals!

I no longer need pre-eminence, prosperity, position, promotions, plaudits, or popularity. I don’t have to be right, first, tops, recognized, praised, regarded, or rewarded. I now live by presence, lean by faith, love by patience, lift by prayer, and labour by power.

My face is set, my gait is fast, my goal is heaven, my road is narrow, my way is rough, my companions few, my Guide reliable, my mission clear. I cannot be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, diluted, or delayed. I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of adversity, negotiate at the table of the enemy, ponder at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity.

I won’t give up, shut up, let up, or burn up till I’ve preached up, prayed up, paid up, stored up, and stayed up for the cause of Christ.

I am a disciple of Jesus. I must go till He comes, give till I drop, preach till all know, and work till He stops.

And when He comes to get His own, He’ll have no problems recognizing me. My colours will be clear.

Today, Palm Sunday, we cheer Jesus as he marches into Jerusalem. But Jesus doesn’t care about our shouts from the stands. He calls for us to get up and follow him, as he marches to the cross, and beyond that to eternal life.

Will you follow him? Will you commit yourself to be a whole-hearted follower of Jesus?

Next Steps:

-) Say “Yes” to Jesus. “I will follow you, my Lord, wherever that may take me.” But rather than being a burden, being with Jesus is our joy, our love, our life!
-) Say “No” to yourself. Put aside pride, selfishness, vanity. Be willing to stick your neck out, for the sake of the gospel.