**Luke 9:51–62** 51When the days were approaching for him to be taken up, Jesus was determined to go to Jerusalem. 52He sent messengers ahead of him. They went and entered a Samaritan village to make preparations for him. 53But the people did not welcome him, because he was determined to go to Jerusalem. 54When his disciples James and John saw this, they said, “Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?” 55But he turned and rebuked them. “You don’t know what kind of spirit is influencing you. 56For the Son of Man did not come to destroy people’s souls, but to save them.” Then they went to another village. 57As they went on the way, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” 58Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” 59He said to another man, “Follow me!” But he said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” 60Jesus told him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” 61Another man also said, “I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say good-bye to those at my home.” 62Jesus told him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

I have to tell you that the first time I heard this text, as preparation for preaching this sermon, the words that just jumped out at me were: **“You don’t know what kind of spirit is influencing you. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy people’s souls, but to save them.”** It turns out there was good reason these words jumped out at me.

If you turn to your NIV text you will find that those words are not there. That’s because those who put together the NIV and other translations have determined that following just a certain group of Greek texts is the only way to go. We disagree with that. We believe when looking at ancient text you go with the earliest and the most widespread. When you do that, you find that more ancient and more widespread texts include the words you see here. I do believe that they belong to the original text of Scripture.

What powerful words they are. Just take a moment and think of what they say. Here are people who are rejecting Jesus and the disciples want to call down fire from heaven and destroy the people. Jesus’s response? Well, the words before us. **“You don’t know what kind of spirit is influencing you. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy people’s souls, but to save them.”**

So what do those words tell us? Are we to maim and destroy those we disagree with? Are we to treat them harshly or pummel them into submission? The answer would be, “No!” In truth, God’s Word tells us to speak God’s truth in love. To be the example of Jesus before such people. It is not my job, or yours, to hurt or harm in this world but to share God’s truth. To proclaim the facts and then remind the people that God sent his Son to die for us. Jesus came to save souls. It is true, that at the Judgment Day those souls who rejected Jesus and his love will face God’s judgment for eternity, but it is not our job to inflict that judgment on people today. We are to stand on the truth and to stand in love, firmly but gently to help people grasp the truth wonder and nature of God’s love in Jesus. I am thinking there are a few radical churches in our land that need to hear and heed these words of Jesus. Just as Jesus asked the disciples so they should ask themselves: **“What kind of spirit is influencing you?”** To decide you can do what is contrary to God’s Word is not of and from the Holy Spirit of God.

Wow, we haven’t even really gotten into this text yet and already we have learned something about following Jesus. That’s really what is being taught here. Our theme: **THE COST OF FOLLOWING JESUS.**

Wait a minute Pastor. What do you mean by that theme? What do you mean by saying there is a cost to following Jesus? I thought that salvation was free, by grace! I thought all we had to do was believe in Jesus and his victory for our sins and that was it! So what do you mean by implying there is a cost?

Well, I think you will understand what this is all about as we dig deeper into our text. It is true, there is no cost for salvation because there is nothing we have to offer God that could pay for our sins. So not a cost in that sense. And yet, in truth, following Jesus will have a cost, an impact on our lives and it is not necessarily the impact that many people think it is. Jesus warned his disciples with words like: **“All men will hate you because of me.”** It is clear that following Jesus is going to have an impact, a cost for us.

Our text starts out simply enough by saying, **"Jesus was determined to go to Jerusalem."** When we understand how all the Gospels fit together this helps us to see that Jesus is but months away from the events that will highlight his earthly ministry. Jesus sets out for Jerusalem, because it is in Jerusalem where he will suffer, die, and rise from the dead to win for mankind the victory over sin death and the devil. Jerusalem is the place where the extent of God's love will be clearly seen, but as he and his disciples are traveling on the road there are some rather interesting things that occur.

I call them interesting things, but at the same time I also mean to help you understand that they are difficult things. They are things that we are told because we need to grasp what it means to be a Christian and a disciple of Jesus. This text, as our WELS publication The People's Bibles tells us, *"Would provide many opportunities for further training in service."*

The first part of our text is actually a rather sad account. As Jesus was preparing himself and his disciples for the events that would take place in Jerusalem, he determined that he would go through many of the towns and villages of the land in order to, one last time, bring his message of sin and God's love to the people.

The part of the journey that our text first relates is what happened when Jesus desired to go through Samaritan territory. The province of Samaria lay between Galilee and Judea. It was inhabited by people who had been brought in by the Assyrians some eight centuries earlier. The Samaritans were by blood, half Jewish but over the years an intense hatred had developed between the Samaritans and the Jews. The biggest reason for this was the fact that while the Samaritans retained elements of the Old Testament faith, they had twisted and bent the essential elements of the faith, until finally the Jews, under the direction of God, rejected them as true believers. I think you can grasp the hostility and yet remember who finally rejected the Samaritans for unbelief.

What is amazing is that Jesus had already made an effort to show the Samaritans that because of his work, they could be included. Jesus had ministered to the Samaritan women at Jacob's well during the first year of His ministry. At that time, because of this woman's testimony, many of the Samaritans came to faith in Jesus as the promised Messiah. Yet as the time passed by, it seems that this Samaritan revival had a relatively short term effect, at least in the town before us. Our text now tells us, **"They went and entered a Samaritan village to make preparations for him. But the people did not welcome him, because he was determined to go to Jerusalem."**

The old false beliefs that the Samaritans had, they just couldn't seem to get past. Instead of welcoming Jesus, they determined that since he didn't meet their expectations they didn't want anything to do with him. They knew the cost of discipleship. It would mean giving up their false beliefs and their wrong ideas about God. To them the cost was too high. They wanted nothing to do with Jesus.

What about us? As we consider what it means to be a Christian, a true Christian do we think the price too high to pay? Are we ready to give up our false assumptions and ideas about God? Are we ready to fully and truly submit to the truth of God's Word. All of its truth? Or is the cost too high? I think of the many churches out there today who tell us they follow Jesus and yet they reject huge portions of God’s Word because, well, that’s not what is convenient in this world. Is that following? Or does this text reveal the truth that Jesus will just walk away! Be careful, we do not have the right to impose our standards, our desires, our wants our ideas over and above the truths of Jesus and His Word.

Our text goes on from there. As they were traveling we are told, "A man said to him, **'I will follow you wherever you go.' Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.'"**

Pastor Prange writes about this in The People's Bible. *"The first comes as a volunteer promising to 'follow you wherever you go.' It is a bold promise. In response Jesus points out that to be one of his followers means joining company with one who has less than even foxes and birds: 'The Son of Man has no place to lay his head.' Are you ready to give up house and home for my sake? Count the cost."*

Pastor Prange’s words are well put, “Count the cost!” This man who wanted to follow Jesus was probably one who thought Jesus was going to be a great Messiah, a worldly Messiah who ruled in this world. That was far from the truth. Jesus was going to die for his kingdom. Jesus was going to give his all and His kingdom was not going to be in this world, thus his words. To add that that, Jesus even said, **“Blessed are you whenever people hate you, and whenever they exclude and insult you and reject your name as evil because of the Son of Man.”** (Lk 6:22). Following Jesus is not going to be about wealth, health, the good life and only the beautiful things of this world. It is going to be a challenge and history certainly bears that out.

In the early Christian church to be a believer often meant you would lose your house and home, perhaps even your life. Yet many people considered Jesus well worth the cost. In today's world we don't have to give up our house and home for the sake of Jesus but I believe that is going to change and has already. The hostility of the world upon Jesus is coming. What would you be willing to give up to follow Jesus? Your lifestyle? Your possessions? Your life? We need to understand that following Jesus can mean a tremendous cost. Are you ready and willing to pay the price? Get this, some of us won’t even give up our beds to follow Jesus.

We go on. "**59He said to another man, “Follow me!” But he said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” 60Jesus told him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”**

Here is another hard saying that addresses the cost of following Jesus. The man in this case wanted to go and fulfill what was considered a sacred family obligation by the Jews, yet Jesus is not ready to give this permission. In essence Jesus tells the man "Let the spiritually dead bury the spiritually dead. Your task is to proclaim the Kingdom and truth of God."

There are priorities to be set when one becomes a follower of God. The first priority is to God and His Holy Word as it is proclaimed in the Scriptures. That is to be first. Not family, not friends. Not the ways and pleasures of this world. God is first and that's the way it is to be.

Following Jesus will result in conflicts. Are you one of those people who seems to think that it doesn't matter what you believe just so you believe something? In every area of our life God and what His Word says is to come first. This is what it means to be a Christian. To me this lesson is the very same one Jesus taught by the words, **“No servant can serve two masters. Indeed, either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.”**

Finally there is the last part of our text. It says, "**61Another man also said, “I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say good-bye to those at my home.” 62Jesus told him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”**

Back in those days plowing was done with donkeys or oxen. To not pay attention to your plowing would cause you all kinds of difficulties. Crooked furrows, broken plows or even animals hurt and harmed. Just as one could ill afford to look back while plowing, so one can ill afford to look back once Jesus is found.

What does Jesus mean by this? My mind goes immediately to the passage I quoted before about the two masters and also to what Jesus said in Luke 14(26-27), **“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”** When you follow Jesus that's what you should do. Don't look back desiring the sin you could have done or the wild times you missed. Don't be a Christian who doesn't pay attention to the task God has given you. God doesn't want crooked row Christians. God expects that true Christians will put their heart, mind and soul to the field of His Word. God expects that you grasp the wonder and marvel of Jesus and that you will recognize that Jesus and the eternal salvation he promises is worth everything in this life. Everything! Do we grasp that?

So, these are hard sayings. They dare not be interpreted in isolation from the rest of Scripture. In these statements Jesus is obviously making strong statements to get across the point he wants for all who would follow him: you will need to be ready to follow. To be a follower of Jesus means to be ready to reorder the priorities of this earthly life. Such is the cost of discipleship.

As you contemplate these words and think of them in the coming week, I pray that you grasp them in the wonder of Jesus. He was going to Jerusalem to be our Savior. He was going to endure the cross and with it eternal damnation for each of us. Please grasp that Jesus is worth following. He offers eternal treasures and eternal life. What is that worth to you? Amen.