

JUNE 26, 2022 – MISSION

Our gospel today comes from Luke 9: 51-62

Today, we are going to talk about mission. Our gospel today is found in the ninth chapter of the Gospel of Luke.

Throughout the centuries, scripture scholars have identified the ninth chapter of Luke as a **turning point**.

It is a transitional chapter.

The ninth chapter of Luke is where you will find the **Mount of Transfiguration**, and we can look at that mountain as a dividing line.

The first half of the ministry of Jesus climbs up one side of that mountain, while the second half slides down the other side.

And our gospel today falls on the backside of that mountain.

Jesus is turning his face to Jerusalem.

And our gospel today puts its finger on a question, and it's a profound question, an important question, a question we should consider.

And that question is this, **what does it really mean to follow Jesus?**

If we are to call ourselves Christians, if we're going to wave **that** flag, what does that really look like? Does it mean that well, you know, I go to church on Sundays?

Is that what it means?

Does it mean that I'm just really nice to other people?

I mean, what does it really mean to follow Jesus?

What does that require?

That is a complicated question, and that is a question we are going to answer today.

But before we truly answer that question, we have to ask ourselves another question.

And that question is this, is my mind made up?

So, let's talk about this.

Like I said, we're in the ninth chapter of Luke, and of course, to really understand this little gospel, this very snippet, small part, you would do very well to read the entire ninth chapter of Luke.

It's not that long.

And if you did, you would find there's a common thread that weaves throughout the ninth chapter of Luke.

And that thread is **ego**.

Ego is the balance of the **intellect and emotion**.

Both very powerful forces, but between the two, the more powerful is emotion.

As a result, emotion often drives intellect, which is where we get into problems.

Certainly, it gets in the way when we are following Jesus because truth be told, ego stands for easing God out.

Because as soon as the unholy trinity of me, myself, and I gets involved, we are no longer walking in the spirit.

Today, we will find ego on full display with James and John and others.

So, let's talk about this.

The ninth chapter of Luke begins with Jesus sending out his disciples and he gives them power and authority to cure the sick, and cast out demons, which must have been pretty amazing.

But he did and they do.

And Luke tells us that they were quite successful.

Next up comes the feeding of the 5,000 which of course some talked all about last week, with just five loaves and two fish, a huge crowd is fed with leftovers. We talked about worthiness.

Again, must have been incredible.

Next comes Peter's confession, where Peter is clearly illuminated as he declares Jesus as the son of the living God, the Messiah.

Soon, they're climbing the Mountain of Transfiguration, and as they climb down the other side, we see the devastating effects of ego.

You might remember this story.

After having this amazing mountaintop experience, where Jesus had started to glow, and Moses and Elijah showed up, they came off the mountain and what's the first thing they ran into?

A problem.

Which when you think about it, is kind of how life is.

One moment you can be on top of the mountain.

Everything's great.

The next moment, you're in the valley and you are dealing with the problem, which is exactly what happened to the disciples.

They came across a demon-possessed boy that they could not cure.

Remember now, they had just returned from their mission trip where they had been very successful.

They had cured many people.

But they cannot help this boy.

Why?

Well, may I suggest, the reason why is ego.

May I suggest, the reason why they could not cure the boy is because they had **started to believe in**

**themselves**.

And like I said, as soon as me, myself and I get involved, Holy Spirit can't move.

Now, the reason I suspect this is the case is because of what transpires shortly, in the 42nd verse.

An argument breaks out among the disciples, and you know what it's about?

Who's the greatest?

It's funny, isn't it?

You know what that's all about?

### Ego, easing God out.

That's what that's all about.

The moment we start thinking it's somehow about us, guess what?

We lose.

When the days for Jesus being taken up were fulfilled, he resolutely determined to journey to Jerusalem.

Now we've talked about this time or two in the past, but the Greek language is much more precise than the English language.

Consequently, there are many times where much is lost in translation, and such is a case today with the words when the days were fulfilled.

When these days or when the days, I mean, we read that, when the days, okay, who cares?

When the days. But in Greek, no.

The Greek word is and that word, means to be swamped with water.

They had cast out many demons.

So, these days are not just normal run-of-the-mill days.

No, no, no.

The flood is beginning to pour in.

Jesus is turning his face to Jerusalem, and he knows what's coming, and what's coming is not pretty.

So, he's in a place where he is being swamped. The ship is going down.

You know, it kind of reminds me of that old song, "The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald."

Remember that song?

I love that song.

It's based on a true story.

And Gordon Lightfoot really captures this word, with the words, "When suppertime came, the old cook came up on deck, "said fellas, it's too rough to feed you. "

At 7:00 P.M., a main hatchway caved in. "He said, fellas, it's been good to know you."

Wow.

Ever been there?

Have you ever been faced with where there is no plan B? That's where Jesus is now.

But of course, in his case, it's a little different, because he is very much the mastermind of his own death, which is something that I think that we don't think too much about.

But you know, he could have bailed out at any time he wanted.

He even says I have the power to lay down my life, and I have the power to freely pick it up again.

But thank God he doesn't, because through his death and suffering, he purchased the greatest gift that this world has ever been given.

Of course, we're talking about eternal salvation, which is something that we need to keep in mind when we are going through because we will.

Jesus never promised us a trouble-free life without any pain or suffering if we follow him.

He told us that we would go through trials. He told us we would go through storms.

Remember that parable about the house that's built on rock and the house built on sand?

Remember that?

And he says, "And when the storms came, they buffeted the house."

He didn't say if.

He said **when**.

Because storms are going to come.

Who knows?

You might be going through a storm right now. If so, hold on.

As Paul wrote to the Romans, "Nothing can separate you from the love of God. Nothing, not even death itself."

So, hold on, Jesus is going to get you through your storm.

When the days for Jesus being taken up were fulfilled, he resolutely determined to journey to Jerusalem, and he sent messengers ahead of him.

Now, I want to talk about that word, resolutely. What does that word really mean?

Well, I looked it up.

It means firmness of purpose, regardless of danger, to journey resolutely is like a soldier going behind enemy lines.

He knows that there is a chance he might not survive, but he is determined. It's sometime like getting the job done before a new person comes in, like immediately OR it won't happen.

Why?

Because he has made the decision that he is going to carry out his mission.

There's no turning back.

And this is our first clue as to what is required to follow Jesus.

We've got to make our mind up.

On the way they entered a Samaritan village to prepare for his reception there, but they would not welcome him because his destination of his journey was Jerusalem.

Now we've talked about this a time or two before, but the history between the Samaritans and the Jews is complex.

Really all kind of started in the Babylonian conquest, when **Babylonia conquered Israel**, they flooded Samaria with no less than five different ethnic groups from other lands that they had conquered.

And they did this intentionally, figuring if they could dilute the **national identity**, they would quell any possible revolt.

Now, when it came to Samaria, after they had carried off the majority of the men into captivity of slaves, those who are left behind, a lot of them, married with these foreigners, thus mixing Jewish blood.

And to the devout practicing Jew, ooh, that's a big no-no. So, the Samaritans are considered dogs, but that's not all. They worship the same God as Jews, Yahweh.

But they had vastly different opinions as to how Yahweh and **where** Yahweh should be worshiped. The Samaritans believe that Yahweh should be worshiped on a mountain in the middle of their own territory, called Mount Gerizim.

While the Jews were insistent the Yahweh is only to be worshiped in the temple in Jerusalem.

So, these people, they're not fans of each other. In fact, they hate each other.

And the mere idea that Jesus would pass through the Samaritan village was unthinkable.

And it's no surprise that they were not received warmly.

So here comes James and John, I love these guys. The sons of thunder.

Hey Jesus, would you like us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?

Really?

Here we go again, ego.

**They're not receiving us with the respect that we deserve.**

So, let's kill them all.

Let's call down fire and burn them up. Really?

You can't make this stuff up.

This request is rooted in Jewish history, very much related to the prophet, Elijah, whom they had just, by the way, seen, on the Mount of Transfiguration. You can read all about it in the First Kings. That's a book in the Old Testament.

Elijah calls down fire and burns up four hundred Priests of Baal.

But can you imagine?

They want to burn up all the Samaritans. And what does Jesus want to do?

Go to another village.

And there's a real lesson here for us.

When things don't go our way, so many of us allow this world to twist us up and fill us with hate and resentment, and we allow our ego to block the spirit.

Meanwhile, Jesus says, hey, let's just go to another village.

And in other words, shake it off.

Why?

Because he's **focused forward**, not back. Jesus **doesn't have time for that nonsense.**

His focus is on the mission, the big picture, the long game, which case you forgot is to bring salvation to this world, which is what this gospel is really all about.

As they were proceeding on their journey, **someone said** to him, I'll follow you wherever you go.

Jesus said, "Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the son of man has nowhere to rest his head."

In other words, you want to follow me. **It's going to cost you.**

In other words, while we might want God to fit into our lives, what happens when it's going to cost us? What happens when it gets a little uncomfortable?

And to another, he said, "Follow me."

But he replied, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father."

But to him, Jesus answered, "Let the dead bury the dead, but you go and proclaim the Kingdom of God."

Now this has been a very confusing verse over the centuries, for many people, because it seems to suggest that this man's father has just died, and Jesus is telling him he can't go to the funeral.

But that's not what's going on.

When this man says, let me go bury my father first, what he's saying is, let me take care of my family affairs first.

Then I'll get to you.

You know, **I'll work you in.**

It's not that his father has just died, but let's just say for argument's sake that his father did just happen to die.

it would've been the Jewish custom that he'd be placed in a tomb that day and a mourning period would commence for a year.

Then after a year, the tomb would be reopened, the bones would be collected and placed in a box called an ossuary, and then buried.

So even if he had just died, it would be a year before he could follow Jesus.

In other words, let me take care of my affairs, and I'll get to you someday.

I'll get to you after a while.

Which is the story of Christianity.

Someday, after a while.

And you know what the problem is with someday?

You know what the problem is with after a while?

It never comes because someday is not a day of the week.

And another said, "I'll follow you Lord, **but** let me say farewell to my family first."

Which sounds like a very reasonable request.

But what he's really saying is let me get ready,  
which again is a universal problem with Christianity.  
We spend all our time getting ready.  
Some of us spend our whole lives getting ready.  
But to him, Jesus says "No one who sets his hand  
to the plow and looks what was left behind is fit for  
the kingdom of God."  
Do you want to know why?  
Because you can't plow a straight line looking  
backwards any more than you can ride a bicycle  
looking backwards.

That's not going to work out for you.  
It all comes down to this my friend, have you made  
your mind up?  
Or are you going to spend your whole life getting  
ready? Jesus is calling you today.  
Are you going to answer the call or are you going to  
get to it someday?  
You know, after a while?  
So, back to where we started.  
How can I follow Jesus?  
What do I need to do?  
Well, I can think of three things. Number one, seek  
his will in my life. Seek the quiet voice.  
First thing in the morning.  
I have found that if you don't check in first thing in  
the morning, God's real hard to catch up with in the  
afternoon.  
So that's number one.  
Number two, ask the Holy Spirit to subjugate my  
ego.  
Ask him to reign it in.  
Not my will, Lord, your will, be done.  
We are at war between flesh and spirit.  
Ask God to equip you for the battle.  
And then number three, look for an opportunity to  
carry the message.  
Watching the field in front of you, not behind you.  
And it could be as simple as a kind word or looking  
for the opportunity to be of service to other people.  
And should the opportunity present itself, share our  
testimony.  
My friends, there's a mission going on.  
Won't you be part of it?  
Time to come out of the bleachers and get into the  
game. Will you follow him today?  
Is your mind made up?

-Rev. Katie Dailey, Pastor First UCC, Richmond