

3 Pentecost Luke 9:51-62
Christ and Grace June 30, 2019
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I've mentioned before that it's in the summer that we hear all the juicy or challenging, and sometimes difficult scriptures – the ones they don't teach the children in Sunday school. Today we have another one. Today we have a story where Jesus seems downright grumpy – it's almost like he doesn't want any followers. I've been reading this gospel all week trying to figure out what Jesus is saying to his followers, what the writer of Luke's gospel is saying to his audience of early Christians and to us about being disciples.

In looking at what came before the text we just heard, I saw that Jesus had been teaching, preaching, feeding 5,000, walking on water, and casting out demons. He hiked up the mountain with Peter, John, and James in tow where these three disciples saw Jesus with Moses and Elijah, transfigured in the cloud. They heard the very voice of God saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" Surely at least these three disciples knew of the mighty power of God made manifest in Jesus.

And then I saw that Jesus also "called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal."¹ All of these disciples had witnessed the power and authority of Jesus, and, it had been given to them.

So James and John, at least, want to take their newfound power and authority for a test drive. They are ready to command fire to come down from heaven and consume those Samaritans. And Jesus rebukes them, knowing that children playing with matches never turns out well. As I pondered this, I thought about some times in my younger days when I played with some metaphorical matches and was rebuked by Jesus. Maybe you have had that experience?

Looking at all these stained glass windows, I don't see an image in here of a grumpy, rebuking Jesus. I wonder if that's because what we prefer is a kind, loving Jesus. Sunday school classrooms in churches everywhere always had pictures of gentle Jesus – knocking on doors, holding lambs, talking to children who sat in his lap, healing and blessing and feeding everyone.

And maybe we want to think Jesus is always gentle, but scripture proves otherwise because sometimes Jesus needs to rebuke us. Sometimes Jesus needs to save us from ourselves and the bad choices we make. Sometimes Jesus needs to save others from our misguided use of power and authority, from the results of our calling down fire from heaven when we are sure we are right and others are wrong. And so then I began pondering the ways that Jesus saves us over and over from our enflamed passions and angers and judgments. And what I begin to see is that rebuking Jesus and gentle Jesus seem to blend, merge together to become the Jesus who loves me unconditionally.

¹ Luke 9:1-2

What is interesting is that the followers of Jesus continued to follow Jesus after that rebuke. One of them said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." Another was willing to follow but wanted to first bury his father, and a third wanted to say goodbye to his family before following. But Jesus was clear with them that following would not be easy. It would not be warm and fuzzy all the time. It would require a change in priorities. So essentially, Jesus has rebuked them yet again by telling them that nothing could come before following him.

At first, being rebuked by Jesus is no fun! It's unsettling and jarring; it can feel like a kick in the gut, an upending of our plans, or the loss of something we don't think we can live without. Teresa of Avila was a 16th century monastic and saint, who oversaw a number of monasteries. Once during a fierce rainstorm, as she was on her way (probably with matches in her hand!) to chastise the nuns at one of these monasteries, she slipped down an embankment and landed in deep mud. She looked up to heaven and rebuked God saying, "If this is how you treat your friends, no wonder you have so few of them!"

Maybe we have had occasion to say something similar to God when we have assumed we were doing what was expected of us, only to find ourselves deep in mud. Or maybe we want to follow but have times when we are only able to gaze at the comfortable windows, letting the light and love of Jesus shine on us and warm us.

You see, we are all disciples, yet we are none of us perfect, and most of us could stand a little rebuking from time to time. Followers of Jesus sometimes need to sit at the feet of Jesus, sometimes we need to answer the door when Jesus knocks, sometimes we are called to help Jesus feed the hungry, teach the children, and work on rebuking the demons of this world that lure us to follow our own desires rather than following Jesus.

Take a moment to consider where you are in this story, or where you are in one of these stained glass windows. Wherever you are, acknowledge it. And then notice that Jesus is there with you, calling you to follow – for the first time or the one-hundredth time.

Jesus has called us to be disciples and has given *to us* power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases, sending us out to proclaim the kingdom of God. What will our response be? What are our priorities?

It may take us some time to ponder, but Jesus will lead us to the answer, just as he led Teresa. As you go out today, take with you this prayer by Teresa of Avila to remind you that you are called, that you are loved unconditionally, and that Jesus is with you and waiting for you to follow.

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.

Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours. Amen.