

Is Jesus Getting Fed Up? ©

Luke 9:51-62

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When I read this passage about the people who wanted to follow Jesus or who Jesus invited to follow him and how the last two had excuses to wait – things they had to do first – and as I was texting our Presbyterian men while they were at Bible Study, I suddenly remembered this story written by Edward Hays in his wonderful book full of modern parables, titled *The Magic Lantern*. I'm not going to include the entire story because it's a bit long, but it goes something like this:

One day as Jesus and Peter were walking down the road, they met a young man to whom Jesus said, "Come, follow me."

"Rabbi," he said, "I have heard about you and the good works you are doing. I am honored to be invited to join you, but let me think about it. I need to sit with your invitation awhile and pray over it."

"What? If you need time to think about it, then you are not fit to be my disciple!" Jesus turned and swiftly walked away.

Peter caught up with him. "Master," he said, "that's not an unusual request. Why not let him consider all that it means to follow you?"

Jesus glared at Peter. "You didn't need time to think about it, to ponder all the possibilities. You and your brother immediately joined me when I invited you. No, let him be; I made a mistake. He lacks the 'stuff' of discipleship."

Jesus, feeling a tug at his sleeve, turned and again saw the young man. "Master," he said, "please don't be angry with me. You see, I have commitments. I'm married, and I should go home and talk it over with my wife. I'd also like to see what my parents and friends have to say about it."

"Go home and stay there!" was Jesus' sharp reply. "If you have to talk it over with others, then your heart's not free enough to risk all. If you're not willing to risk everything, then you have no business being one of my friends!" Again, Jesus turned and made a hurried exit.

Catching up with Jesus, Peter said, "I know, Lord, that I didn't ask my wife or family if I should follow you, and I didn't need time to think about it. I knew what I needed to do the moment I saw you and heard your invitation. But this young man is ... more prudent...he's not so impetuous. I think ..."

At that moment Jesus felt another tug at his sleeve. Turning, he was once more face to face with the would-be disciple. "What is it this time?" inquired Jesus. "I thought you had gone home."

"Please understand, Master, I would like to follow you ..."

“Don’t call me ‘Master,’” returned Jesus. “Your wife, your home, your family and your business are your Master.”

Like a whirlwind, Jesus turned and stormed down the road. Peter ran after him, confused but committed to following his friend.

A short while later they entered a village and passed a synagogue where a group of men were visiting on the front steps. Jesus stopped and eyeing a short, stocky man said, “Come, follow me.”

The man spat at Jesus and yelled, “You are the last man in the world that I would want to follow! You heretic, you blasphemer!” And he began picking up rocks and throwing them at Jesus. At this, the man’s companions joined him in pelting Jesus and Peter.

Jesus, running as fast as he could with the rocks whistling by him, gave Peter a big grin, saying, “I like that man!”

Panting, Peter moaned, “Rabbi, I’m confused. I don’t get it. You were so rude to that ‘good’ man back there. He only wanted time to think over your invitation. Now you invite this man, and he abuses you, calls you names and throws rocks at you. How can you be fond of such a person?”

“Ah, good friend Peter, you don’t understand human nature. The young man who needed time to think was afraid of making a mistake. He’s wishy-washy, undecided about *all* of life. The man who spat at me, on the other hand – ah, there’s real passion! Peter, the flip side of great love is great hate! For the man who spat at me, who hates me, it takes only a split second, a lightening experience, to somersault great hate into great love. By the way, do you know his name?”

“I’m not sure,” answered Peter. “I think his is called Saul.”¹

And of course, we know that Saul did indeed have a lightening experience on the road to Damascus, after hating Jesus and his followers, after great persecution of the early church. Saul was transformed in that experience and became Paul – the most vigilant worker for Christ in spreading the good news and starting many churches in that day.

Certainly, in this parable, created by Edward Hayes, Jesus does appear to be fed up, doesn’t he? We read the passage for today, where Jesus extends an act of kindness and friendship by making the unusual decision to go through and even stay the night in a town of Samaria, rather than do what all devout Jews would do – that is, go around Samaria so there would be no chance of contact. As we’ve said before, the Jews and the Samaritans hated each other. That feud began after the long exile to Babylonia, where some of the exiled Jews intermarried with their captors and started families.

First of all, the Samaritans were not considered pure Jews, by the Jerusalem Jews. Besides that, they had a very different belief about where the place of worship should be. Instead of

¹ Hays, Edward, *The Magic Lantern*, ©1991, Forest of Peace Publishing, Inc., Leavenworth, KS, p. 92-94

Jerusalem, they believed Mount Gerizim was the holy, sacred place of worship. So their hatred of each other was both racial and religious.

But when James and John saw how the Samaritans were turned down that opportunity – one that Jesus offered so graciously – they were furious. They wanted to ask God to rain pure, hot fire down on their heads.

And Luke tells us Jesus rebuked them. Rebuked James and John, not the Samaritans. Miriam-Webster's online dictionary defines the word *rebuke* as: *to speak in an angry and critical way to (someone); to criticize or reprimand sharply.*

Kind of sounds like Jesus was a little fed up with his disciples, doesn't it? They were the ones following him; learning from him. Yet, they seemed to not get it, much of the time.

Jesus most likely knew that the Samaritans would reject any offer of friendship. Knowing Jesus was a Jew, heading to Jerusalem – his face set on what was ahead for him – they were just being themselves. The selves that had developed over many, many years.

Yet Jesus offered anyway. And he wasn't about to call for their destruction. No, instead he was headed to the cross for their salvation.

Mitties McDonald DeChamplain writes in her commentary in ***Feasting On the Word, the Gospel of Luke***: "Jesus will allow nothing to distract or sidetrack his forward movement toward Jerusalem – not even travel into alien or hostile territory, with the strong likelihood of rejection. The journey of Jesus was never a search-and-destroy mission; it was a seek-and-save venture."

And Barbara Brown Taylor says: "One deals with rejection by absorbing and disarming it, not by returning it in kind." (***Feasting on the Word, Gospel of Luke***)

But, the passage goes on to add these other would be followers. Although they seem to want to follow Jesus, they aren't fully committed. One says he will follow Jesus wherever he goes. But, apparently he doesn't seem to follow through, when Jesus tells him even foxes and birds have homes to sleep in.

Jesus, on the other hand, is homeless. He has no place to lay his head for sleeping. He eats when food is available and sleeps wherever he finds himself.

It seems harsh, doesn't it, when one of them just wants to go home and bury his dead father. But, we aren't even sure if his father has died yet. Maybe he is saying he wants to wait until after that happens.

But if his father has already died, shouldn't he be able to bury him first, before giving up his life for Jesus? It does sound harsh to us, but it also emphasizes the urgency of the time to follow being now, not sometime in the future. "Jesus is not trying to drive away followers. He simply refuses to blunt the sharply pointed reality that to share in the work of Jesus is to share in his sacrifice." (DeChamplain)

And the other man ... he is a lot like the one in the modern parable by Edward Hays. He says he wants to follow. "But first! ... let me just! ... I have to do these other things first! And Jesus says to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

In other words, if you make a commitment but keep looking back at what you've left – well, you're pretty lukewarm. You probably aren't going to be very passionate about following. Your mind is going to keep dwelling – keep longing for what could have been. Lukewarm is synonymous with wishy-washy, I think.

"Abraham Lincoln is reported to have said, "I walk slowly, but I never walk backward."" Lincoln's statement conveys an image of determination and steadfastness in pressing on with what is true and right, regardless of the cost." (DeChamplain)

Instead of pressing forward towards a war that would free slaves, as Lincoln did, Jesus was set to go forward in order to free the whole world.

It seems that Jesus was okay with the Samaritans rejecting him out of their life long history of hating the Jews. Yet he was fed up with James and John for wanting revenge; and he seemed rather fed up with those who would be lukewarm disciples.

So ... where does that leave us? "The Church is full of hypocrites!" Have you ever heard that said? Some people say that's why they don't come to church. We act like sinners, just like the rest of society, and yet we come to church and worship and claim to have a great life.

And the truth is, we are hypocrites! Or at least we are sinners. We are as much a sinner as anyone who is not a part of the church. We just happen to know it and come to worship anyway; come to confess our sins; to ask for forgiveness and to receive that word of grace and assurance.

But then there is the constant threat of forgetting who we are, as the Church. Of becoming just another organization – a clique that can be exclusive to those who are looked at as outsiders. The Church has the potential of becoming more of a country club than a place of worship and prayer, of confessing and receiving assurance.

I have a feeling that Jesus is pleased with a church ... and with a disciple ... who may be an active sinner, yet who keeps trying, and keeps repenting, and is passionate about getting it right, even though it hasn't happened yet.

I think he might get fed up with a Church, or a congregation, who is there purely for itself – to admire it's beautiful building; who gets stuck staying inside the security of the walls of that building, rather than being willing to go out to a world of hurting people; to go out and to welcome all who enters in.

I think I know what type of church we are. I feel pretty confident that we are passionate about our faith and our discipleship. But there is danger of becoming too sure of ourselves. There is always the potential for pride to slip in and take over.

It is important that we continue to have a passion and an active love for Christ Jesus and for the ministry and mission he has commissioned us to be about. We must keep our faces set on him and continue to press forward as disciples of Jesus.

Is Jesus getting fed up? I hope not. I pray not. But, Christians, always remember – fed up, or not – Christ died for us; Christ rose for us; Christ prays for us; Christ reigns in power for us.

We are a new creation in him. We have grace and forgiveness and always the invitation to begin again if we have gotten careless, or lukewarm, or wishy-washy in our ministry.

Jesus did make it to Jerusalem and to the cross. And that is always good news for us, who are sinners. Amen.

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