

Scripture reading: Luke 9:57-62 NLT & LBA

As they were walking along, someone said to Jesus, "I will follow you wherever you go."⁵⁸ But Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens to live in, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place even to lay his head."⁵⁹ He said to another person, "Come, follow me." The man agreed, but he said, "Lord, first let me return home and bury my father."⁶⁰ But Jesus told him, "Let the spiritually dead bury their own dead! Your duty is to go and preach about the Kingdom of God."⁶¹ Another said, "Yes, Lord, I will follow you, but first let me say good-bye to my family."⁶² But Jesus told him, "Anyone who puts a hand to the plow and then looks back is not fit for the Kingdom of God." (Luke 9:57-62 NLT)

Y mientras ellos iban por el camino, uno le dijo: Te seguiré adondequiera que vayas.⁵⁸ Y Jesús le dijo: Las zorras tienen madrigueras y las aves del cielo nidos, pero el Hijo del Hombre no tiene dónde recostar su cabeza.⁵⁹ A otro dijo: Sígueme. Pero él dijo: Señor, permíteme que vaya primero a enterrar a mi padre.⁶⁰ Mas Él le dijo: Deja que los muertos entierren a sus muertos; pero tú, ve y anuncia por todas partes el reino de Dios.⁶¹ También otro dijo: Te seguiré, Señor; pero primero permíteme despedirme de los de mi casa.⁶² Pero Jesús le dijo: Nadie, que después de poner la mano en el arado mira atrás, es apto para el reino de Dios. (Luke 9:57-62 LBA)

SUMMARY:

Purpose, meaning, authenticity, joy, and love are found as we break free of ways that contain, control, and limit love and justice. We are called to confidently break new ground and follow in the way of Jesus: the justice-seeking, action oriented, passionate, and compassionate JESUS – the JESUS who says the kingdom comes near when we LOVE GOD, neighbor, enemy and self wholly and authentically with heart mind and soul. Are we willing to follow by leading lives in which others experience God's grace and love and justice in our being?

Let us Pray

As we sit here in the midst of your many mercies, we are mindful that we and so many of our brothers and sisters who dwell in places

short of mercy,

absent of justice,

defaulted on the gifts of life.

The way – your way – is not easy.

The breaking new ground is hard and messy and scary - and we are tempted to give up, look down, look away and turn back.

We can recite the grocery list of needful people and violent places but YOU know them all. As You know them and we know them, we pledge in this company to take these needful people in these violent places as our CALL from YOU. - AMEN¹

To recount for those who have not been with us in recent weeks, and for those who have... This year, as a community our Lenten theme is nothing short of scandalous! And we said a scandal was what?

Causing general public outrage by a perceived offense against morality or law, tradition, ritual or Dogma, e.g., a series of scandalous liaisons; and the life and ministry of Jesus.²

And we said THE SCANDAL of JESUS was?

That the religion based on following the WAY of JESUS - the justice-seeking, action oriented, passionate, and compassionate JESUS – the JESUS who says the kingdom comes near when we LOVE GOD, neighbor, enemy and self with heart mind and soul - has become an individualistic, domesticated religion which lulls us into quiet complacency and preserves the empire of self, ego, privilege and power.

Now, we can lament the CHURCH, ORGANIZED RELIGION, TRADITION, and our FAMILIES. We can so easily point the figure at others. We can so easily complain about the world and others who conspire against us; against me; against “my people.” We can so easily profess that “we’re not like that; we’re spiritual not religious” or “we’re real and relevant” or “we are followers of” this or that, rather than one label or another. And as much as we want to try to distance ourselves, the real question and the ultimate scandal is this: ***What about our lives is so compelling that others glimpse God’s kingdom coming near? What about our way of***

¹ Based on *Prayer of the Church* by Walter Bruggemann as found in *Prayers for a Privileged People*, 2008.

² Part 4 in a 6 part series: 1 Scandalous Jesus, 2 Rule Breaking Jesus, 3 Love Making Jesus, 4 Rabble Rousing Jesus, 5 Table Turning Jesus, 6 Resurrecting Jesus

living, is so compelling that others glimpse God's grace – are blessed in and through our presence – and/or experience even if for a moment - the very real presence of God's kingdom coming near?

That is THE POINT of the Scandalous Jesus – of why Jesus breaks rules and breaks boundaries and breaks down walls... That people – no matter how outside or marginalized, no matter how down trodden or meek – witness and experience and can see themselves and feel themselves embraced in and by the LOVE of the LIVING GOD. That we can see and feel ourselves embraced in and by the LOVE of the LIVING GOD. That even in a momentary glimpse, a passing glance, a chance meeting, encounter, conversation or even a conflict; the seeds of hope and love are sown – and I and we and all of us are compelled “to go and do likewise.”

The scandal of our day and of the last 1700 years is that we've been willing to confess “I will follow” and then have every excuse why not today, why not tomorrow, and why “I will follow” is layered a list of compromises and contingencies as not to make us too uncomfortable or following too inconvenient or costly. And yet unless we receive and choose wholly this invitation – we are told over and over and over in the scriptures the Kingdom will not and cannot come near!

Jesus paints this marvelous picture with words, a picture that may be hard for us to hear or even imagine. We hunger for deeper relationship. We want to find purpose and meaning in our own lives. God lays out this profound invitation to us and we - - - miss it...

And as much as I want to say we are all just too busy and leave it there; **Jesus doesn't leave it there.** We're distracted, over busy, multi-tasking and filled with worry, anxiety and expectations – real and imagined. This is true. **And this** is a scandal, but it is not THE SCANDAL. THE SCANDAL is that faith and “following” have been overly politicized, individualized, distorted to serve our emotions, limited to what makes me feel good and right and better at the expense of others; and church, doctrine, dogma and orthodoxy have become the objects and subjects captivating of our hearts, minds, souls, praise and worship AND HAVE gotten in the way of following THE WAY.

And Jesus calls this out – it was true in Jesus' time and it is true even now!

Growing up we had a pretty good sized vegetable garden, and about this time of year, we'd have to prepare the soil by breaking open the hardened crust. With hoe and rake and

eventually a roto-tiller – we’d be out there for weeks. Now in Jesus’ day they had rake and hoe – and to till large patches of earth they’d hook up a plowshare to an ox or two. Whether modern or ancient – no matter – Jesus’ point is amazingly the same.

When I was real young, my job was hoeing and following behind the tiller to pull out the stones rock and brick-a-brack that had gathered. Eventually one year it was my turn to learn how to till the garden - I don’t remember when exactly. Maybe I was 8 or 9, no matter – I do remember though that the machine which I had so diligently followed for all those years was now thrust into my hands – as much a rite of passage as a practical solution to the reality that unless my brother and I learned how to work the field in a couple of years the garden would not be planted.

And so I stood there – ready to plow my first row; looked pretty simple – and straight forward. I braced myself, started the engine and began stepping slowly forward. Letting the blades break open the long dormant ground. 3 feet, 4 feet, step by step holding on and guiding the tiller as it walked its way forward – 8, 9 10 feet into the row - I was feeling pretty good. I looked back to see my dad watching from the garden’s edge – a thumbs up and a smile on his face gave me the feeling of great satisfaction. As I basked in the warmth of his approving stare; his one thumb held up as a sign of distant approval was quickly joined by his other nine fingers – and he began gesturing wildly as though I’d just scored a touchdown. And that approving smile quickly vanished as he lunged toward me.

“Curious?” I thought as I returned my focus to the task at hand. In my momentary lapse of glancing over my shoulder to seek my father’s approval, I’d inadvertently let up on the pressure guiding the tiller forward. It had climbed out of the row I was trying to make, veering to the right and threatening to rip up the rows so carefully tilled and planted during the prior week!

This is the point. It is not that we are just distracted – rather to follow while we look back over our shoulders *simply doesn’t work!* To look back is to let worry guide us; To look back is to let regret fill our hearts; To look back is to choose anxiety and fear and the need to seek approval from others – rather than to trust in and rest in and depend on the Love and grace of God!

You want to know why you hunger for deeper relationship – and don’t seem to go anywhere. You want to know why you thirst for deeper meaning in your life and yet day by day

week by week feel like you're going nowhere in relationship with self, others, creation and Creator?!

This is THE SCANDAL – to which Jesus is calling us out of – and inviting us to join together in – to follow in a way that leads us toward living as though the Kingdom of the Living God is near... to follow humbly and wholly that in our being justice is embodied and love comes to life (is Incarnate)... to follow in ways that the poor in Spirit experience God's Love, that those who mourn are embraced and comforted, that the meek are emboldened, the merciful experience mercy, and all who hunger for love and thirst for justice are fed in by and through our lives and **our** presence. That when we find ourselves in conflict we meet one another humbly as sojourners exhausted by injustice and burdened heavily by oppression. That in every conflict we choose to break new ground in our hearts and lives rather than looking back to sow and re-sow the seeds of fear, anger, bitterness and doubt³ –

Just this past week here at the Center on halsted (COH) a conflict erupted when one person acted in a way that rubbed the other wrongly. Words were shared – hurtful bitter words were shared. Amazingly despite both being people of color questions of racism were even sounded. And both individuals ran to their circles of friends – justified in their actions and self-righteous in their anger. With a great deal of promoting and encouraging – the two were coaxed into meeting with each other a few days later to share their experiences. And despite a great deal of skepticism on the part of both parties – they sat and LISTENED and HEARD and to their amazement found out that intent and impact were profoundly different, that when one had spoke from their own experience it was heard differently and in a hurtful way because of the other's past experience in another time and situation – that the anger and hurt and bitterness from the past had gotten in the way of what should have been a simple conversation. And that in and through their courage to move beyond the initial blow up – they were able to break new ground – and let God's grace flow in them and through them.

Are we willing to follow

- even when it is not comfortable or convenient?
- when it costs us our knee jerk reactions, bitter words and swords that must be beaten into plowshares?

³ *Hope in the Face of Conflict: Making Peace with Others the Way God Makes Peace with Us* by Kenneth C Newberger, 2009.

- Without looking over our shoulder to mimic the ways and peoples and traditions of the past that preserve pride, harden hearts and rob us of praise and worship?
- In humble exploration and experimentation as collectively we become the body breaking new ground resurrecting hope and preparing the way for the seeds of God's love and light to flourish?

Are we willing to lead lives together as we explore, question and celebrate the way of scandalous love and justice that ***our storied lives are so compelling that others glimpse God's grace – are blessed in and through our presence – and experience even if for a moment - the very real presence of God's kingdom coming near!***

Heavenly Creator - Gather us up this day into the reality of Your good purpose, compel us in Your holy calling that by the time we leave each other we will know – yet again – that Your mercy and justice and compassion are the way forward.

You are the God who gives bread and wine, table and water, Word and song, and with them: courage, freedom, and energy for the task to which together as ONE BODY - we are unequal.

Keep us simple and on task, and we will praise You by in our hearts and minds and souls. Living the SCANDAL of YOUR WAY - No Turning Back! AMEN⁴

⁴ Based on *Prayer of the Church* by Walter Bruggemann as found in *Prayers for a Privileged People*, 2008.