

## Intervening to Enlighten His Own

June 30, 2019

Scripture: Luke 9: 51-62

*51 When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. 52 And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; 53 but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. 54 When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" 55 But he turned and rebuked them. 56 Then they went on to another village.*

*57 As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." 58 And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." 59 To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." 60 But Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." 61 Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." 62 Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."*



Good morning church! Today we continue with the third message in our four-part series entitled "Intervention".

As you receive this message, I wanted to share that it is about 4:30 pm where I am in Switzerland. As I begin this morning, a quick review of where we have been in this series. In the first week we saw God intervene to set things right on behalf of Naboth. Last week we looked at how Jesus intervened to restore the man possessed by demons, bringing the man wholeness and setting him off to

bear witness to what Jesus had done in his life. This week we continue on in the gospel of Mark, turning to chapter 9. Before I pray, I invite you to turn to Luke 9, to verse 51 in your Bibles. Here we find two stories that at first glance appear disconnected but do have some common ties. We will explore these this morning. Let us pray...

Verses 51 through 56 contain the first half of our passage for today. The passage begins with Jesus setting his face to go to Jerusalem. This is code for Jesus knew his time on earth was drawing to a close. It is not stated in our text, but just like last week, Jesus had a choice on where he traveled. If you remember last week, Jesus chose to land where he did because he knew that on that seashore he would find the man he came to heal. In our passage today, Jesus had a similar choice. Most Jews would choose to go the long way around rather than through Samaria. The animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans was very real. Knowing this, Jesus still chose to travel through Samaria. He knew that this would be his last trip through Samaria, his last time amongst this people. Instead of avoiding them, Jesus made the intentional choice to try and be present to the Samaritans. Jesus chose to cross that lake to be present to the demon-possessed men, and now he wants to have the opportunity to minister to the Samaritan people.

As was his custom, Jesus sent some disciples ahead to "*make ready for him*". Their task would be to find a place that would welcome them, a safe place to spend the night as they prepared to journey on towards Jerusalem. And as was his custom, Jesus would seek an audience to teach and to possibly minister to.

But none of this was to be. In verse 53 we read, "*But they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem*". It is important to understand why the village did not receive Jesus. It is steeped in the roots of years of conflict and hostility. The Jew-Samaritan animosity began when the Jews started seeing the Samaritans as half-breeds. From the Jewish perspective, the Samaritans had inter-married with the surrounding clans and tribes during the time of exile, thus "polluting" or defiling themselves. The Jews considered themselves pure and therefore better than the Samaritans. The Samaritans adopted a chip on their shoulder, thinking themselves to be just as Godly and just as good as the Jews. When the villagers heard that Jesus had set his face towards Jerusalem, it hardened their hearts. This hit their second-class status buttons and they essentially said, if we are not good enough as the destination, then just keep on going. Don't bother stopping here Jesus.

We see that same animosity rear its ugly head in James and John's response to the rejection. They ask Jesus, in verse 54, "*Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them*"? Jesus, do you want us to wipe out these dogs, to call down heaven's fury upon them because they rejected you? Jesus turns and rebukes them. It turns out the disciples were a long way from a finished product. Remember, Jesus made the choice to intentionally pass through Samaria - to try and extend a hand of friendship to a people who are long-standing enemies. Jesus wanted to close the gap, to enlarge the circle. In response to James and John's offer to call down divine power to blot out the village, Jesus instead teaches tolerance, hinting at the fullness of God's saving power. Maybe not today, but one day God's love will include even these.

Saddened, Jesus and the disciples move on to another village. Before we go on to the second half of today's passage, I invite you to consider if you have ever experienced what Jesus experienced in verses 51 through 56. Have you ever sought to minister to someone, only to experience rejection? If you have tried to share your faith often, you have probably experienced rejection. This reminded me of an experience I had on a planning excursion for a mission trip a few years ago. Steve and I flew and then drove down to Shiprock to meet with the tribal elders to line up the work that our teams would tackle that June. After a nice welcome from the tribal president and after a round of introductions, a woman at the table interjected this statement: "If you think you're coming down here to preach your religion at us, you had better think again". Well, ok then. After a very brief awkward silence, Steve had a very grace-filled answer. He simply shared that we were coming to do some work to try and improve people's situations in life. Our faith was leading us to serve others. This woman, like the Samaritans with the Jews, had bad experiences with people of faith. And like Jesus' response James and John, grace was the answer for us too.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus sought to ministered to Jews and Gentile, to the socially, ritually, and politically outcasts. In our opening verses he now makes effort at the Samaritans too. Why? Because there are many ways to God. We will encounter some with no church, no denomination, no connection. Like we found on the Navajo Nation, at times we too must recognize that no person has a monopoly on the truths of God. Like Jesus found in Samaria, our world today is one of diversity, competing narratives, and different contextual realities. Like it was in Jesus' ministry, may the wideness of God's mercy and love be evident in our ministry to outcasts and those on the margins.

When we are in a position like Jesus was, when we are approaching a situation with our best intentions, aiming to show compassion and to foster reconciliation – and our efforts are rebuffed – it can be hard to check our emotional reactions. We may even ask be tempted to ask God to intervene, but sometimes God corrects and redirects us like He did with James and John. It takes humility to accept this correction and redirection. That day in Shiprock, Steve was a great model of this for me. As our trip would play out, yes, we had ample opportunities to witness to the love of God for all people. But, as is most often the case on mission trips, the greatest faith growth was not in the Navajo people, but in the people of the Dakotas. This revelation led me to ask myself and us this question: in what situations might I or we need to humbly accept that we are the object, not the beneficiary, of God's correction?

In the second half of our passage for today we find another take on the cost of discipleship. Beginning in verse 57 we encounter three people in a row who sense or hear the call to follow Jesus and to enter into discipleship. Like the Samaritans who rejected Jesus' presence amongst them, these three also take a pass on entering into a relationship with Jesus. Just as we are sometimes those who experience rejection when we try and share our faith, we sometimes are also the people who take a pass on what Jesus is calling us to.

In verse 57 the first person states, *"I will follow you wherever you go"*. In response to this bold statement, Jesus replies that the foxes and birds have places to lay their heads, but that he has no set place to lay his head. That is the end of the first conversation. The unknown is enough to deter this person.

The second person receives Jesus' calls to "*Follow me*" but says, 'just a minute'. The man responds to Jesus' invitation with a request for more time. He says in verse 59, "*Lord, first let me go and bury my father*". In our day and age this request makes perfect sense to us, right? Just as it does today, the burial process involved a period of mourning and a burial. Then as now, this was a family responsibility that the man wants to honor. But most scholars believe that the man's father was not dead yet. The man wanted to be free to perform his familial duties whenever his father passed. He was prioritizing what will come to be over what was currently before him. The man was "putting his commitment to family ahead of service to the kingdom". Jesus demanded that he was the only priority. Jesus rejects the excuse to postpone discipleship. Biblical scholar F. W. Danker notes, "many a would-be follower of Jesus has pleaded the requirements of social obligation or previous business demands as an excuse for not meeting the imperative of obedience". Many of us have honed this skill of saying 'just a minute' in our day and age.

In the third person's encounter with Jesus, this person just wants a brief reprieve. Just let me go and say goodbye to my family. Jesus' response is similar here too. Instead of addressing our tendency to postpone following or to delay doing something for our faith, Jesus here addresses our tendency to not follow fully. It is the old battle of self versus obeying the will and way of God. Jesus rightly points out that we cannot follow two things at once. Our commitment to our faith cannot be split and it cannot be part-time. Following Jesus must be the sole focus of followers of Christ. Yes, it is a hard demand, but it is the demand that Jesus makes nonetheless.

To close this morning, I would like to share the story of how God became first in the life of a would-be follower.

*A young man growing up in the wrong part of Houston became a bully. He would get in fights in school, in the neighborhood, and began mugging people to get spending money. He even beat up people just for the sake of doing it.*

*He learned to box and became pretty good at it. He began to make a lot of money and could have almost anything he wanted. One day, during his training session for an upcoming bout, he heard his mom talking to his sister on the telephone about his favorite nephew. The young boy had had a seizure and now lay in a coma in the hospital. Doctors said he would probably die, but that if he came out of the coma he wouldn't be able to move his limbs, or speak, or do any of the human functions we consider part of living.*

*He ran into the room where his mom was on the phone and shouted, "Momma, call the hospital and tell those doctors to give him the best of everything. Tell them I'll take care of all the bills, to fly in the best doctors from wherever they have to. Tell them who I am, and that I'll take care of everything — whatever it costs."*

*His mom spoke to the doctors, and then told him, "Son, you're just going to have to pray." He realized then how grave the situation was. When someone tells you the only thing you can do is pray, things are looking pretty bad.*

*Then it hit him. All of his money, his fame, his influence, his friends — none of that could solve this problem. It was out of his hands, out of the doctor's hands, out of everyone's hands. For the first time, he was totally powerless.*

*And for the first time, George Foreman dropped to his knees and prayed. He wasn't sure God existed, but he knew that when all else failed, people prayed. He asked God, if he really existed, to help his nephew. Then he got back in bed. A few seconds later, he got back on his knees and offered to give up all his wealth if God would heal his nephew. Then he got back in bed again. A few seconds later he got back on his knees a third time and got angry at God for letting this happen to his nephew, a child who hadn't experienced life yet. George told God to take his life instead. Let the boy live and take his life instead.*

God intervened once again. George's young nephew survived. That encounter with God was powerful. It was only when George came to the point of total surrender, of saying not my will but yours God, that God become real and powerful and a part of his life. Eventually George Foreman gave his life to Jesus, became a pastor, and went on to share his faith with many, many people.

When we hear the call to "come and follow me", we have a choice to make. Will we be scared off by the unknown of where Jesus might take us? Will we tell him 'just a minute' or come up with some other excuse? The call is clear – come and follow me. May our response be just as clear. Let us pray...

**GPS - Grow, Pray, Serve**

- 1) Grow. What "Samaria" could you intentionally go to so that you can extend a hand of friendship?
- 2) Pray. Where or how is God calling you to "come and follow me"? Pray for God's guiding hand to be at work in your heart.
- 3) Serve. Who do you know that is trying to connect to God in a non-conventional way? How can you partner with them?