

Sermon on Wednesday 30 September, by Melanie Seward

Reading: Luke 9:57-end

Responding to an invitation

When I was thinking about retiring I made a mental list of what I would do with my time: learn a foreign language; work my way through the great pieces of classical music; loose three stone and get fit; read the bible - including the bits I avoid because I find them uninteresting. Currently, after four years, I have read some of the books of the bible, lost two stones, listened to a few pieces of classical music unknown to me and completed no language study whatsoever.

The achievement of the goals would demand: a lot of time, significant effort, some discomfort and a great deal of perseverance. Learning a language was indeed a rash promise to myself.

How about you? Can you identify any rash promises made to yourself or others?

The first man in our Gospel says to Jesus, "I will follow you wherever you go". How was this said? Was it a statement of serious intention made after prayerful reflection or a rash (albeit enthusiastic) response made on the spur of the moment? Jesus' answer is designed to bring him down with a bump, **"Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."**

This is a coded message – 'Fox' was the insulting nickname given to Herod - the Jewish king, who was a corrupt and cruel puppet of the Roman Empire. And 'birds of the air' referred, in general, to Gentiles and specifically to the Romans. Jesus was in growing danger from both the Jewish and Roman authorities. Had the individual promising to follow Jesus wherever he went considered what such a move would mean for his lifestyle and his reputation, let alone his safety?

Jesus invites many to follow him. Two more examples are given. Each individual delays or side steps making the decision. One says, "First, let me bury my father" – well, clearly, 'his father' has not died or he would be sitting Shiva (observing the Jewish custom of staying at home to pray), so he is really saying, "I'll follow you when my father has grown old and died and I have no social responsibilities... and I am totally free do as I please". The other 'would-be disciple' wants to go home and say farewell - everyone would guess that his father will not bless such a decision and instead demand that he fulfil his duty to the family.

'Come and follow me.' What is stopping these people? Could it be that they fancy the idea of being on the right side, maybe the winning side, with a political messiah (who will reign one day over a renewed nation), but balk at the reality of following a man with no physical headquarters, who instead wanders with a band of followers challenging the social and religious teaching of the time with no safety net for himself and no guarantees for his followers.

The idea of following Jesus is attractive, but it requires them to count the cost, make real changes to their lives and look forward to a different future. Their hearts have seen a glimpse of the message of Jesus, but they are not moved enough to commit to action.

'Follow me' is an invitation that is issued every day by Jesus. 'Don't look back,' says Jesus. Take the plunge, make the decision, commit to living a life with God, follow in my footsteps and obey my teachings, says Jesus, the Son of God. Be prepared to change and leave an old way of life behind - the way of living that side-lined the importance of making the love of God and the love of others central in our lives. Like the middle Eastern plough, if you look back the furrow will wobble all over the place. A God-focus rather than a material-focus will keep us on the straight and narrow.



These Gospel examples are about an initial decision to follow Jesus, a decision that must be made to walk the way of Faith. Yet this passage also speaks to everyone - to self-professed Christians as much as those who have yet to freely choose the Christian Faith. Jesus issues a daily invitation to, 'Come and follow me'. And each day we can delay, prevaricate, be distracted by the day-to-day detail of our lives; let faith take a back seat so that our thoughts, decisions and actions are shaped by the everchanging pushes and pulls of society instead of stemming primarily from the love of God.

In his ministry on earth, Jesus led a life shaped by prayer; he stays in touch with God the Father, he is motivated by divine love and his ministry to live out that love in God's created world, and we are called to live the same way.

It is a challenge. I may not be asked to leave my family or my country, but, when I next shop, will my choices be shaped by the amount of plastic packaging I add to God's creation? When I next buy clothes, will I be cognisant of the who and how of their manufacturing? Today and tomorrow, how will I make my decisions about how to use the resources I have at my disposal? Will I choose to be uncomfortable and speak the truth to injustice? Will I love those labelled 'the unlovable'?

'Follow me,' says Jesus.