

Sermon Preached at the Episcopal Church of the Holy Comforter
2701 Park Road, Charlotte, NC 28209
The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, June 27, 2010
Year C, Proper 8 RCL [Galatians 5:1, 13-25; Luke 9:51-62]
The Reverend Scot McComas, Interim Supply Priest

O Holy Spirit of God, Take our minds and think through them, Take my lips and speak through them, Take our Hearts and set them on fire with Love for You, though Christ our Lord. Amen.

Jesus said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

Ever since I first heard this passage in my 9th grade youth group at my Presbyterian Church in Dallas, Texas, I have been bothered by this text. I was bothered by what seemed to be the harshness of Jesus' words. It took me a long while to understand that this passage is not really about Jesus being callous and unfeeling by not allowing people to go and bury their dead relatives before they followed him. But it's more about the sense of urgency that Jesus wants us to decide whether or not we are committed to him.

The Gospel further reads, "Another said, 'I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home.' Jesus said to him, 'No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God'." Another difficult passage, which seems rather harsh. But again, it's about the sense of urgency – partly perhaps because Jesus knew his time was limited to complete his father's mission but also because Jesus does not want us to be wishy-washy or tentative in our faith. Jesus wants us to be firm in accepting and claiming our faith in God.

Jesus knows each of us here today just as he knew his disciples 2000 years ago. Jesus knows our human nature, our tendency that if we drift away from him there is a possibility that we will not come back, or that we will become distracted by other things in life and not follow God. Jesus knows there is a lot competing for our time and energy. The danger is not being solidly tied to our Lord and not developing a firm spiritual foundation. There is another danger; it is the possibility of following another God.

Following another God. Remember the first commandment Moses received from God? "I am the Lord your God, you shall have no other gods before me." This temptation then is still with us today. Following another God. Actually, this is a real possibility, which tempts us from time-to-time, does it not? Can the many mini-gods in our society fill our internal hunger? Money, power, prestige—they are fleeting. We need to ask ourselves, "What drives us? What controls us? Who or what do we allow into our lives to guide us? Where do our values come from? From society? From family? From God?"

What makes us get caught up in idolatry? What makes us get caught up in what society tells us *what* is worthy, instead of listening to Jesus who tells us *we* are worthy? It's difficult sometimes not to get caught up in all the things society throws at us because we're human. Jesus' disciples had similar pressures of their own day influencing them. But Jesus kept saying over and over to his disciples, "Be in the world and not of the world". He continues to say that to us today as Christians, "Be in the world and not of the world."

Stand firm in your faith. Don't allow yourself to be assimilated into what society dictates is right and valuable. Don't allow others to create that world for you. Stand strong and true, knowing what's right and ethical and good and kind and loving. All those things that we've just read in today's epistle.

In Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, we read near the end, "If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit." If we say we'll live by God's Spirit, then let God guide us. Let God lead you where God would have you to go. But we have to be participants in this journey, do we not? So where would God have us go? Not very far—just look toward Christ. The word is very near you. It is in your heart, and on your lips, and in your mind.

How else can we be guided by the Spirit? Look at today's collect for an example, "Almighty God, you have built your Church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone: Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their teaching, that we may be made a holy temple acceptable to you." This can be the foundation of our faith.

When we do this, we not only will be following God, we'll be following the right God and not another. When Christ is your foundation—the end all and be all of every day—your spiritual house will be one of bricks and not straw. Amen.