

Introduction:

- A. Last Sunday we began our summer sermon series in Matt. 8, a portion of Scripture that emphasizes the authority of Jesus Christ. We saw Jesus demonstrate different aspects of his authority in three miracles—his authority to make us clean, to honor the faith of anyone who believes in him, and his authority to take up our infirmities of body and soul. Turn to Matt. 8. That theme of Jesus’ authority continues with three more brief stories. Follow with me: **vv.18-27...**
- B. We’ve sung this morning about following Jesus. **These connected stories both welcome and warn anyone who plans to follow Christ.** Each of these three brief stories have a dual message. On the one hand, they each demonstrate an aspect of Jesus’ authority, and on the other hand, they each emphasize a corresponding aspect of discipleship—what it means to follow him.

Illus.: When Texas pastor **Jim Denison** was in college, he served as a summer missionary in East Malaysia. While there he attended a small church. At one of the church's worship services, a teenage girl came forward to announce her decision to follow Christ and be baptized.

During the service, Denison noticed some worn-out luggage leaning against the wall of the church building. He asked the pastor about it. The pastor pointed to the girl who had just been baptized and told Denison, *“Her father said that if she was baptized as a Christian she could never go home again. So she brought her luggage.”* [PT.com]

What is there to be learned from Jesus’ brief exchange with that teacher of the law? *“Teacher,”* he said *“I will follow you wherever you go.”* To which Jesus replied, rather cryptically, *“Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”* There are two things to notice:

1) It is the *Son of Man* who is homeless. “Son of Man” is an exalted title, connoting something like ‘the man of all men.’ Here is the Messiah of God yet he was born in a stable, and cradled in a manger. Then he and his parents became refugees in Egypt. He had, in fact, *had* a home—the glorious company of his Father, but he left that to ‘tabernacle’—to ‘tent’—among us.

2) To his followers, he says that anyone who wishes to follow him is choosing this same displaced, unsettled life. Jesus’ point isn’t really just that this teacher of the law would have to give up his comfortable bed to sleep on the ground. It’s bigger than that:

I. TO FOLLOW JESUS, SURRENDER YOUR CITIZENSHIP IN THIS WORLD (8:18-20)

- A. Jesus was homeless because he was always on the road with the gospel, constantly going from one place to another. This man who vowed to follow him was likely enamored with the things he’d heard Jesus teach and the miracles he’d seen Jesus perform. Who could blame him for wanting to be close to that kind of action? But **Jesus was also homeless because, in a larger sense, this world had no place for him.** He was not welcome even in the City of David, Jerusalem, or on Mt. Zion. Yet he was the Lord of all, the Son of Man. And he chose this life in order to rescue us from this world.
- B. This statement from Jesus *has* to mean more than that some Christians will not sleep in their own beds any longer. When we follow Christ we surrender our citizenship—our place—in this world. Our loyalty to this world runs far deeper than anyone’s patriotism for their country, yet Jesus calls us out of it. **Jesus Christ has the authority to call the citizens and prisoners of this world out to a new King and country, leaving us without a place of our own in this world.**

- C. What is required to demonstrate our loyalty to this new King and country? Jesus said, *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.”* Mt 16:24-25.

To take up our cross that we die to ourselves and the dark world around us. We give up the values of pride for the values of servanthood. We die to the treasures of earth that we might store up for ourselves treasures in heaven. We sing of our salvation from sin when the world around us considers the gospel folly and nonsense. We set all our hopes on a homeland we have never seen while constantly pulling up stakes from this dying world.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, *“When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”* That’s what we sign on for.

Thomas à Kempis wrote in *The Imitation of Christ*, *“Jesus has many who love his kingdom in heaven, but few who bear his cross. He has many who desire comfort, but few who desire suffering. He finds many to share his feast, but few his fasting. All desire to rejoice with him, but few are willing to suffer for his sake. Many follow Jesus to the breaking of bread, but few to the drinking of the cup of his passion. Many admire his miracles, but few follow him in the humiliation of the cross.”*

But who of us dares to make such a commitment, knowing our own fickle hearts as we do. What was this teacher of the law to do? My old book teacher, **Alexander Maclaren**, wrote, *“[Jesus’] object was not to repel [the man], but to turn an ignorant, somewhat bragging vow into a calm, humble determination, with a silent ‘God helping me’ for its foundation.”*

Now this next fellow. Whereas the first would-be follower was over-confident, this second man is holding back. Though, frankly, who could blame him? He said to Jesus, “*Lord, first let me go and bury my father.*” To which Jesus replied, “*Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.*” Wow! That seems pretty harsh! To attend to the burial of one’s own father is near universally understood as an inviolable obligation.

Remember how each story has a dual message. This one says that Jesus has such authority as to create a kind of alternative family, and with it, radically different loyalties. And the message to disciples is that following Jesus means switching our deepest loyalties to our new *first family*.

II. TO FOLLOW JESUS, TURN YOUR LOYALTIES TO HIS FAMILY (8:21-22)

- A. It’s possible this man meant, “*Once my father has died—whenever that might be—I’ll be back to follow you.*” But it is more likely that the situation is as it sounds: he’d be back as soon as the funeral and proper mourning period was over. Now, Jesus could not have meant that this son was to leave his father unburied and decomposing unless some other dead relatives buried him! In fact, I don’t think the issue was really whether or not he could be at his father’s funeral. When Jesus said, “*Let the dead bury the dead,*” he was saying, “*Let those who are not in my new family of the living take care of those who are in the world of the dying.*” It was a bigger principle than the man attending to his father’s funeral. **The Message** paraphrases Jesus’ words this way: “*First things first. Your business is life, not death. Follow me. Pursue life.*”
- B. I’ve told you recently how radical the New Testament teaching is regarding our bonds as believers in the church. In the ancient world, there was no higher loyalty than blood

relations. It had nothing to do with where you liked your family or not. To miss his father's funeral was simply not an option. No one, but no one, could fail in that responsibility. But Jesus tells us that those who follow him, who believe in him, *they* are his mother, brothers and sisters. He said in **Matt. 10:37-38**, "*Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me.*"

N. T. Wright said about Jesus words to this grieving son, "*the only explanation for Jesus' astonishing command is that he envisaged loyalty to himself and his kingdom-movement as creating an alternative family.*" **Joseph Hellerman** expands on that: "*Jesus did not simply intend for His followers to substitute **a personal commitment to Him** for ties of blood family loyalty. He intended for them to exchange their loyalty to one family for unwavering loyalty to another—the family of God.*"ⁱ

- C. That is a truth lost on many Christians today—including many of us here in this room. This doesn't mean that we must be at every church event at the expense of the health of our own spouse and kids, but it does most definitely mean that the people of God are our first family.

About a month ago, when **Anne Tohme** preached here, she talked about her family's ministry commitments in their work at Trinity:

In our family there are often times when Kelvin or I are gone – gone because of soccer, fixing network issues, away leading missions trips, away at night meeting with college students or at meetings here. This is similar to so many of you. And when we talk with our kids about

this – about why mom or dad are gone we explain to them that it's because we are a part of two families. We have our family of the 4 of us, but we are also part of a bigger family – the family of God, and we have a role in both families and we need to care for both families. And yes, we may miss that person when they are gone, but we know how important it is that they go. Ultimately, our role as parents and the church is to raise up our children to advance the kingdom – shouldn't they see us modeling that? Shouldn't they see us (and participate with us) in loving the family of God and not just our own little family?

Remember the story: “Her father said that if she was baptized as a Christian she could never go home again. So she brought her luggage.” **To follow Jesus, turn your loyalties to his family.**

Now, in our final story this morning, instead of disciple wannabes we get a look at what it was like for those disciples who actually followed him. **Vv.23-27...**

III. TO FOLLOW JESUS, YOU WILL BE PUSHED TO THE LIMITS OF YOUR FAITH (8:23-27)

- A. It is an extraordinary scene. Violent storms on the Sea of Galilee are not unusual. The lake is 600 feet below sea level, and is ringed with high hills, like a funnel. When the conditions are right, fierce winds come on suddenly, whipping the water into a frenzy. The Greek word used here is the same word used for an earthquake, as if the storm was like a tsunami. If waves were sweeping over their boat they would soon be swamped and sink.
- B. The first of our dual messages in this account emphasizes the seemingly impossible demand of discipleship. Here

they are, in an epic life-threatening storm at sea. They really aren't overreacting. They're fishermen, for goodness sake! They know the sea. And Jesus *sleeps*! What good is a sleeping Jesus? But when they wake Jesus with their frantic cry for help, "*Lord, save us! We're going to drown!*" Jesus scolds them, "*You of little faith, why are you so afraid?*"

If we're going to follow Jesus, we'd better brace ourselves because this will be our story, too. Surely there have been times when you've prayed, "*Lord! Wake up!! Save me! I'm going down for the third time!*"

"*You of little faith, why are you so afraid?*" Well, *because I couldn't get a rise out of you and time was running out.* Make no mistake, the storm was life-threatening. So are some of the things we face. Following Jesus is a constant test of faith. Will we trust him in this crisis? Will we obey under these circumstances? It isn't failure to be afraid, but it is a failure to abandon ship.

There is real danger. But if we are with Jesus, whether or not he seems to be in control, we are safe. Learning to trust him in those times is part of following Jesus.

- C. The second of the dual messages focuses on the extraordinary authority of Jesus over nature at its wildest. "*What kind of man is this? Even the winds and waves obey him.*" God's people knew that *God* had this kind of authority. **Ps 104:7** says, "*But at your rebuke the waters fled, at the sound of your thunder they took to flight.*" But this was a man! Some teachers suggest that this was a devil-stirred storm because of its violence and that Jesus *rebuked* it, as he did demons. Whether or not that's the case, it is amazing enough that Jesus could simply scold the storm into submission. "*What kind of man is this!?*"

On May 3, 1929, **Zora Neale Hurston**, the collector of African American culture, heard and transcribed a sermon by **C. C. Lovelace** in Eau Gallie, Florida. At one point in that sermon, Rev. Lovelace painted a picture of this scene before us. It was transcribed in dialect, so I will read it as Hurston wrote it.

*And one of de disciples called Jesus
“Master! Carest thou not that we perish?”
And He arose
And de storm was in its pitch
And de lightnin played on His raiments as He stood on
the prow of the boat
And placed His foot upon the neck of the storm
And spoke to the howlin winds
And de sea fell at His feet like a marble floor
And de thunders went back in their vault
Then He set down on de rim of de ship
And took de hooks of his power
And lifted de billows in His lap
And rocked de winds to sleep in His arm
And said, “Peace be still.”
And de Bible says there was a calm.ⁱⁱ*

Conclusion

Remember that teenager in India: *“Her father said that if she was baptized as a Christian she could never go home again. So she brought her luggage.”*

We are often too lax about following Jesus, aren't we? We dare not make bragging vows of loyalty, nor to turn back because of our little faith, but let us promise our loyalty with *“a calm, humble determination, with a silent ‘God helping me’ for its foundation.”*

Now, as we come to the table, let's think about these things, and let us *follow Jesus, not only to the breaking of bread, but also to the drinking of the cup of his suffering.*

ⁱ Hellerman, Joseph H.. *When the Church Was a Family: Recapturing Jesus' Vision for Authentic Christian Community* (p. 71). B&H Publishing. Kindle Edition.

ⁱⁱ <http://columba11.blogspot.com/2008/04/glorious-sermon-heard-by-zora-neale.html>