

Third Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday, June 30, 2019, Year C

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Luke 9:51-62

***“Follow Me”***

Twenty times in the New Testament, Jesus uses the words *“follow me.”* He says them usually as an invitation, inviting people to come along with the Lord, however in some instances Jesus sets some conditions. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus says *“Come, follow Me and I will make you fishers of men.”* (Mark 1:17) And then, Jesus invites people to make a sacrifice in order to follow Him: *“If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me.”* (Matthew 16:24) (also Mark 8:34) In Luke 9:23 Jesus adds the word *“daily”* to *“take up his cross”* You see, in order to follow Jesus, there are terms and conditions that have to be agreed to. Just like on your phone or PC, you have to click *“agree”* in order to use the program or app. They put all of this stuff that seems like mumbo, jumbo. Most people just agree to it without reading it. I wonder - Do YOU read the whole *“terms and conditions”* before hitting agree? How many of us have terms and conditions of our own? The good news – to agree with Jesus, there are no loopholes, there are no agree buttons, or hidden charges.

Have you ever wondered what Jesus means when He says, *“take up your cross?”* It is puzzling that Jesus refers to the cross quite a while before His crucifixion. What does He mean? The apostles don't know that He will be crucified. When you think of the cross don't you usually think of the hard wood that Jesus was nailed to? In today's day and age many don't realize the terrible thing that it is and seem to have sanitized the cross. Today, when you see crosses they are usually somewhat symmetrical and tidy. They make great jewelry and are often used as symbols of our religion or our faith. There are some people who wear them as good luck charms, believe it or not. There are those wear big silver crosses with big silver chains around their neck but you know by their language that they certainly don't have any respect for the cross.

In the first century, a cross was a very cruel instrument of torture, ridicule and execution and was one of the most horrible ways to die, whether nailed to the cross or tied to the cross. How very ironic that the very symbol at the forefront of Christianity is the thing which brought death to its founder and the death which bought us our freedom from sin and death! It was a very painful, physical, and excruciating death. If we choose to follow Jesus, then His way must be our way. That is what He means by it. The Apostle Paul in Romans 12:1 tells us to present our *“bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.”*

We have a picture hanging in our living room; an awesome picture that we have had there for years. It is a picture of Jesus standing in a doorway. Behind Jesus is a room that is absolutely glowing golden, with people sitting at the tables. It is called *“The Invitation.”* The people sitting at the table are having a celebration like none other. The man at the doorway is on his knees, looking up at Jesus, pointing to himself, and saying ‘me?’ ‘You want me?’ The answer to that is ‘yes, He does!’ Each one of us are called; are called by Jesus, to Jesus – for eternal life.

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There are some Churches that advertise Christianity for what it can do for you, and how it can make things better for your lives – especially those who believe in what is called the “prosperity Gospel.” Jesus doesn’t tell people to ‘*come and follow*’ Him because it will make their lives more comfortable – or that it will give you a Mercedes Benz or a Fiat, or a BMW or some or some great big SUV with really tricked out rims, but because following Him will make their lives eternal and everlasting.

Now here is the fine print and the conditions: Jesus says, “that if you want to be My follower, to be My disciple,” don’t expect a life of complete happiness and freedom from pain. There are going to be days when you don’t want to get out of bed because you feel crummy, because you can’t talk. So, maybe it is a Saturday, you stay in bed. If it is a Sunday – you come to church. You do what Jesus tells you to do. Jesus says, we can expect to die, and we might even die painfully. When Jesus tells us to take up our crosses this is something that “we willingly have to do.” When Jesus got onto the hard wood of the cross – He was not placed there – He did it willingly. He didn’t say anything – He just got on the cross. Why? For you and me – as an example. Taking up our cross is not something that is done to us or for us. I’ve heard people speak about various ailments and problems that have happened to them saying that they have this as ‘their crosses to bear.’ I have to disagree. Taking up our cross is something you must choose to do, willingly. You must choose to make a sacrifice for the sake of the Kingdom of God

There is only one person who can and will help you through such a situation – and that is Jesus Christ – who will help you! How many times have I reminded you to just pray, “Help me Jesus?” And the follow up – “Thank you Jesus.” Taking up our cross is an actual choice we must make – not something that happens to us. If we willingly sacrifice everything for God’s sake, we have taken up our cross. On the other hand, if we make promises to God and we don’t give Him what we have promised, then we are no better than trying to have our cake and eat it too!

We are all familiar with conditions. You know ‘if you do this, then you will get this’ – we all do that. Conditional statements usually begin with the word “if” and are sometimes followed by “then” and then maybe an ‘else.’ Cross bearing is not an option we can take or leave. It is not a conditional statement that is followed by choices. It is not like pressing “1” on your telephone, or pressing “4” to speak Spanish. We willingly do it – or not! Let me give you an example. If you would follow Jesus, then you must take up your cross! It makes sense, really. If we would follow Jesus - we will go where He goes. What about the examples in today’s Gospel - “*I will follow you wherever you go – but first let me bury my father.*” “*I will follow you wherever you go – but let me go say goodbye to my family.*” Jesus says Follow Me – then Follow Me! Loving the people Jesus loved – the hurting and the poor. Jesus lived His life filled with Integrity, Truth, Honesty and Purpose, and He continues to carry that out today! Jesus knew what He had to do, and He wasn’t afraid to make enemies in the process.

Here are some conditions to following Jesus:

- **If** you want to be a follower of Jesus? **then** take up your cross! (it is what will help put the kingdom ahead of yourself)
- **If** you are not willing to take up your cross, **then** please don't call yourself a follower of Jesus!
- **If** you are not willing to sacrifice everything you hold dear, **then** you have no business calling yourself a Christian, for then you are **ashamed of Him**.

No one said it was going to be easy! Remember, if we are following Jesus don't be afraid. There are well over 100 times that 'fear not' or 'do not be afraid' are in the Bible. Someone once told me that there are 365 times that 'fear not' or 'do not be afraid' are in the Bible – but no – I went and counted – there are like 120. They took the words 'fear' or 'afraid' and counted those. 'Fear not' and 'do not be afraid' are spoken by angels when they appeared to people. Nobody said it was going to be easy. So, try to do what it says -don't be afraid – because -

- we have Him guiding us,
- we have Him leading us,
- we have Him giving us strength and
- in some circumstances – He is carrying us.

I just love that poem and picture called 'Footprints in the Sand' in which it comes down to Jesus saying, "there is only one set of footprints because I was carrying you!"

Regarding stuff and situations - Jesus said in today's Gospel, "*Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.*" (Luke 9:58) All we need to do is give Him permission to lead our lives (help me Jesus) – and follow Him. Like the foxes and birds – let God provide and handle the details. I don't know of any bird that wonders if they will have food tomorrow, or is worried about a game and who will win, although in this area – most of the birds are Braves fans. They know that there will be food and provision – knowing that God will provide.

Anywhere we go - Jesus has gone before. He promises to guide and protect. Anything that happens to us, Jesus is standing there right beside us. And finally, when He does choose to end our journey, Jesus will be waiting for us to bring us home!

All Jesus asks of us is this – give Him everything – meaning to give Him ourselves. Is there anything in your life that you are not prepared to give to Him? (Ok now -be honest)

- Your family?
- Your friends?
- Your reputation?

Jesus wants them all, to do with as He sees fit – just lay them at the foot of the cross. Jesus then will be taking you down paths you've never imagined. Please do not worry about what is on the road up ahead. We have our security in Him – the One who died to set us free. Then my friends, you will ready to do what Jesus asked of you – "follow Me."

