

The Sixth Sunday After Pentecost

June 30, 2013

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

Luke 9:57-62

As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." He said to another man, "Follow me." But the man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family." Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." (NIV)

My freshman year of high school I decided to play football. The problem I was only 103 pounds and there was no freshman team. So I had to play JV football with a class of sophomores many of them at least two times my size and a class who would be good enough to win a state title their senior season. I stayed in the dorms that first week of practice and by the end of the week I was beat and beat up. I had scrapes all over my chest from hitting the ground, a big bruise on my left arm, and a chin that you could tell was bloodied several times that week from lining up against guys twice my size in open field live tackling drills. I had enough. I started to think my mom was right. She did not want me to go out for football because she was afraid I would get hurt and said I was too small. So I was going home for the weekend with the thought that my football days were over. I just had to break the news to my dad that I was done.

I still remember the conversation like it was yesterday. My dad told me that I'm not a quitter and he didn't want me to start now, especially after only one week. My dad talked to me about commitment and responsibility. I had made a commitment to this football team. My father wanted to see me carry out this commitment. My dad told me I should finish what I started this year. He also said that by the end of the season if I still did not like football then next year I would not have to play. So I played football. And it was a blessing that I did. I made some wonderful memories and friends, some of whom are still my friends today. I even played football the following year when I was now a lean mean at least 125 pound machine. My dad was right and I was glad I stayed committed.

Dear friends, this morning we are going to focus on a much greater commitment. We are going to talk about the importance of making this commitment a total commitment. And we will realize if not yet, then one day, that this commitment will result in more blessings than we could have ever imagined. Yes, today as we turn to this Word of God I pray it helps us understand what it means to be: **Committed to Christ.**

Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem. He is resolute to make it to the city where He will lay down His life. He is determined to make payment for all sin. Deciding to go through enemy territory of Samaria Jesus is not welcomed in one village so He moves on to another. As Jesus and His disciples make their way we read: "*As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."* A man, Matthew calls him a teacher of the law, volunteers his services to Jesus. He says he is

ready to follow Jesus wherever He goes. Can you understand why people may be eager to follow Jesus, especially if they've seen the power & compassion of this miracle worker from Nazareth? Who wouldn't want to follow Jesus who can feed the thousands with a small meal, heal the sick, and even raise the dead? Who wouldn't want to be among this popular band of disciples who drew large crowds wherever they went? Who wouldn't want to join them in their work? So this man says, ***"I will follow you wherever you go."***

Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." Jesus warns this man about what he is saying by boldly promising to follow Jesus no matter what. Following Jesus will not be all glitter and glamour. Even foxes and birds had more luxuries than Christ. They at least had beds to lay their heads in at night. Jesus was much more concerned about heavenly things than earthly treasures. Service in His kingdom means hardship and sacrifice. Was this man really willing to give up his possessions and home to follow Jesus? Was he willing to live without even a place to call his own as Jesus did? Do we start to see what it means to be committed to Christ?

In this next example we don't have a volunteer but Jesus approaches the person. ***"He said to another man, "Follow me." But the man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."*** This man doesn't seem as anxious to follow Jesus as the previous man. He has an excuse. He asks to first bury his father. Jesus' reply seems to be a bit harsh at first, but remember Jesus is able to see the heart. Jesus says to let the spiritually dead take care of burying the dead. Jesus wants him to proclaim the kingdom of God. It is too late for those who have died, but there is still time to get the message out to those alive. Proclaiming God's kingdom is greater than any earthly, human priorities - no matter how important we view them. Are we starting to see what it means to be committed to Christ?

We have one final example. ***Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family." Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."*** Would you hire a person to paint a straight line down the middle of the road if this person was always looking around and back, easily distracted, and constantly losing focus from the job at hand? You would have a lot of crooked, messed up lines, and probably many accidents. How much more important is service in the kingdom of God! Someone is not fit for service in God's kingdom, Jesus says, if they are always looking back or distracted by other things, including family. Do you see what it means to be totally committed to Christ?

These words of Jesus can be a bit difficult to digest. We have to understand Jesus is not giving some mandate to get rid of all our possessions or forsake our family responsibilities for Him. The Bible actually teaches us to be faithful to our families and in how we use the things we have. But what Jesus is teaching us is that our commitment to Him always comes first. He wants us to follow Him with an unwavering and total commitment. Jesus wants us to put Him and His work as our top priority. Perhaps the main reason these words are difficult to digest is they make us recognize how none of us are fit for service in His kingdom. None of us are fit because of our sins. Which of us can say truthfully that we have made a total commitment to Christ? At times we barely make a partial commitment for His work. Do we mean the words we just sang? *"Jesus, I*

my cross have taken, all to leave and follow you.” Have we sacrificed earthly comforts for Jesus? Have we put Jesus and His Word ahead of family or other obligations? Have we done everything to tell others the good news? The list of our sins that reveal we don't understand what it means to be committed to Christ is long.

Still Jesus knows how unreliable we are, and Jesus hears every excuse, looks into every uncommitted heart, sees every action that puts everything and anything ahead of Him and in spite of everything He resolutely sets out for Jerusalem. Yes, Christ remains committed – to you – to me – and to a world of sinners. Jesus was so committed He left the comforts of heaven to be born as one of us and live in this sinful world, a place where He didn't even have a bed to call His own. Christ is committed to you – so committed He would not come down off the cross, so committed that His suffering would not be over, until every one of your sins was paid for! Christ is committed to us – so committed that He died and was buried so that by rising again He might swallow up death for us in victory! This is why we now follow Jesus. This is why each of us would gladly confess today that we are committed to Christ.

There is a special application here today for those who commit their lives or maybe for some of our young people who may be considering committing their lives to full-time service in God's Church. Believe it or not but I did not choose to come to Amazing Grace in Florence, Kentucky. I did not choose to be so many miles away from our families. God called me here to serve in His Kingdom. He placed me here to do His work. And I'm so glad that He did – for the blessings I have received here at Amazing Grace are more than I could have imagined. The work is not always easy, but what a privilege it has been to serve my Savior. What an awesome thing it is to have a front row seat in witnessing God's Word in action! What a privilege it is to see how the love of Christ compels people to commit themselves to Christ!

But these verses don't just speak to those who serve full-time as pastors or teachers – they speak to all of us. God wants all of us to understand what it means to be committed to Christ. It was only one month ago now that nine young confirmands stood up front here and made special promises about commitment. I hope they remember them all, but I would like to read a portion. *“Do you intend to faithfully conform all your life to the teachings of God's Word; be faithful in the use of God's Word and Sacrament...remain true to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit...and to endure all things, even death, rather than fall away?”* May we all continue to respond with the same answer, **“I do, and I ask God to help me.”**

Following Christ is worth all the bumps and bruises life throws at us. For Christ has committed Himself to you with a loving commitment, an unwavering commitment, and a total commitment. Commit to Christ and you will never be put to shame. In fact, you will receive blessings more numerous than you will ever be able to count or imagine. Commit to Christ, dear friends, and I promise, even better God promises, that in the end you will be glad that you did! Amen.

