

**July 4, 2010
Pentecost 6
Liberty Sunday**

“Are You Ready for the Pressure of Following Jesus?”

LUKE 9:51-62

Luke ^{9:51} As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. ⁵² And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; ⁵³ but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. ⁵⁴ When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, “Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?” ⁵⁵ But Jesus turned and rebuked them, ⁵⁶ and they went to another village. ⁵⁷ As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” ⁵⁸ Jesus replied, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” ⁵⁹ He said to another man, “Follow me.” But the man replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” ⁶⁰ Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” ⁶¹ Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family.” ⁶² Jesus replied, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”

On July 4, 1776, the newly formed United States Continental Congress signed a declaration that said the new country did not want to be under the control and the abuse of the King of England. Along with the declaration of freedom came tremendous pressures and responsibilities that included the threat of war from England.

When you become a Christian you enjoy a freedom that is far better than the freedom we enjoy as citizens of the United States of America. Through Jesus we are free from the punishment that we deserve for our sins, free from the fear of death, free from the control and abuse that Satan brings into our lives. This freedom in Jesus costs us nothing. It was given to us a free gift. But with the freedom comes responsibility that will bring us tremendous pressure. It has been said that it costs you nothing to become a Christian, but it could cost you everything to live as a Christian. As you enjoy this wonderful freedom in Christ, are you ready for the pressure that will come your way as you follow Jesus and you live your life for him?

The pressure that comes from those who reject

One of the pressures that you will face is the large number of people who openly reject the blessings that Jesus wants to bring in their lives. We see the same in Jesus’ life when he was rejected by the Samaritans.

Let’s first take a look at the face of Jesus as he goes up to Jerusalem and realize how much he loves this world in which we live, this stinking mess of humanity that has made itself unacceptable to God because of sin. “As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.” Jesus knew what was ahead for him.

He knew what was around the corner. He knew the guilt and shame of taking the sin of the world on him. He knew what would happen when his Father would punish him in our place. The prophet Isaiah predicted he would be stricken, smitten, and afflicted by his own Father for our sin. There was a determination written all over the face of Jesus that said, "I am going to get the job done, and I am going to do it right."

Look at your face in the mirror. How different our resolve is compared to that of Jesus. Oh, there are days when we are so determined to live our lives the way God wants us to live, but then there are other times when we lose our resolve and fail. We look into the mirror, and in shame we say, "God be merciful to me a sinner." But then we look at the face of Jesus. He is so determined. Look at the face of Jesus when he was a little child. See the determination to live a perfect life pleasing to his heavenly Father in everything he does. We see his determination as he carries the cross. The book of Hebrews says, "For the joy set before him, he endured the cross and the shame."

Not everyone appreciates this determination that you see on the face of Jesus as he goes up to Jerusalem. That was true of the Samaritans who rejected Jesus because they wanted Jesus on their terms. They had no use for a Savior who was going up to Jerusalem to die for them. The Samaritans were a mixed breed of people who wanted some parts of the Jewish religion and some parts of their own religious ideas. They wanted their own place of worship in Samaria and wanted nothing to do with the temple worship in Jerusalem. The Jews hated the Samaritans and the Samaritans hated the Jews.

But Jesus is different. Jesus cared about the Samaritans. He wanted them to see what was on his face as he went up to Jerusalem. He sent out a delegation of disciples to let them know that he was passing through their village. How do they react to the good news that Jesus was passing through? It says, "The people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem."

Why did they reject Jesus? They rejected him because they wanted him to tell them it was OK to have their own religious ideas which did not include the important sacrifices that were part of true worship in Jerusalem. It is no different today. People are clamoring for a Jesus who gives them a religious high or religious kick. They are clamoring for a Jesus who will teach them how to improve the way they live their lives. They are looking for a Jesus who will provide an easy life for them on this earth. They don't want a Jesus who resolutely sets his face to go to Jerusalem to die for them on the cross.

The two brothers, James and John, had little patience with these self made, pesky, religious, pious, condescending Samaritans. "Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to destroy them?" They want Jesus to use his power as God to hurl a lightning bolt into the village and fry every person in that town.

"Lord, can we nuke them?" Ever feel that way about some of the Islamic terrorists who are causing so much misery and suffering for people in our world today? Oh, I am sure we don't pray for God to punish the false teachers who are riding bicycles in our community or knocking on doors and handing out pamphlets that say Jesus is not God. But do we pray for them as Jesus did when he was dying on the cross, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing?"

Jesus rebuked these disciples. He told them they were sinning in their lack of compassion for these people. How different is our Jesus than these disciples or even us. He had compassion on the Samaritans, just as he had compassion on the crowds of people who came to him for the wrong reason. It says in the gospel of Mark that he saw the crowds and had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

To follow Jesus means that we have the same compassion for all people that he had. Think of the pressure that faces us each day as we seek to love people as Jesus did. It is so hard, so painfully hard, to continue to show compassion and understanding for people who reject Jesus. It hurts the most when we see this rejection in friends, family members or people that we respect and love. It is hard to stay on course and faithfully pray for them, or even ask the Lord to help us bring the truth to them as Jesus wanted to do. This is a huge pressure in the life of every Christian.

The pressure that comes from those who are weak

There is another pressure that we face as Christians who want to follow Jesus closely. It is the pressure of seeing people who want to follow Jesus at a distance and not get too involved. We see some of the same weakness in ourselves and it scares us.

As Jesus left the Samaritan village a man came up to Jesus and said, "I will follow you where ever you go." Jesus could see that this man was all talk and no walk. Here was a man who thought following Jesus was a piece of cake, a walk in the park, an easy path. He had no idea what it meant to carry the cross for Jesus that includes the difficult task of denying ourselves, especially the sinful parts of our lives. Jesus told him how hard it was by saying, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man does not have a place to lay his head." A few years ago a television evangelist, one of those faith healers, came to Los Angeles and demanded that he stay in a \$500 a night hotel with gold plated faucets. That was hardly the way Jesus lived his life when he was preaching and teaching. But before we point too many fingers at this person or the man who came to Jesus we need to seriously ask how often we have wanted an easy path for following Jesus.

To another man interested in following him Jesus said, "Follow me." Instead of jumping at the opportunity this fellow told Jesus, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." Under normal circumstances it would be hard to discourage anyone from burying their father unless by burying his father it meant forgetting about Jesus and going back to his old ways. Jesus must have seen this man's true intentions and how weak he was. He told him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." The problem here is not choosing something bad instead of Jesus, it is choosing something good ahead of Jesus.

Think of how we can use our times for good things but then forget about Jesus and his kingdom. On this Fourth of July weekend there are so many good opportunities to enjoy time with families and friends. The stores are even offering specials on food that we can use to BBQ with neighbors and friends. However, if our enjoyment of the blessings the Lord gives us become more important than following Jesus, then something good becomes something bad. In the Christian church there is no end of pressure that comes from

people making the wrong choices when it comes to letting other things getting in their way of putting Jesus first in their lives. In Matthew 6 Jesus said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all things will be added unto you."

Another man wants to follow Jesus but he asks first if he can go back and say good-bye to his family. That seems like a reasonable request, unless going back to the family and saying "Goodbye" leads to forgetting about Jesus. Jesus told this man, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." When Elisha was called to serve the Lord, he butchered his oxen and burned his plowing equipment. He was ready to go 100% for the Lord, and not just half way. There will be pressures and disappointments when we see people cutting corners in their lives to the Lord.

Are you ready to stand up for Jesus and take the pressures that come with following him? Dear Christian we have a peace and freedom the world cannot give. The same Savior who has given us this freedom will also help us handle the pressures that come with following him. "So do not fear, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." Amen.