

Following your Purpose

In the gospel story today, Luke takes us into a situation where Jesus is at his rudest. I mean really rude. He says to someone who says "I want to follow you but I've got a funeral to do." And Jesus says "Nope, no good, funerals don't count, if you can't follow me, you're not a part of me." And Jesus could, it would seem, be in need of a course on courtesy, on politeness, that's not what we do, especially around a funeral, so what's He getting at? So in our story today, Jesus is among the Samaritans. And the Samaritans are mixed: Jewish and Non-Jewish, not very much liked by the Jewish community and for whatever reason as He's walking through this community, they reject Him. And the disciples do something that we've all kind of wanted to do, they go sort of full Tony Soprano in the situation; total mafia. They say "Hey, they're rejecting you, let's rain down fire and destroy them, wouldn't that be neat?" And I'm sure Jesus is thinking "That is not my message; it's not about violence but no, we're just going to go further." And as He's walking further on people start saying "Well I'll follow you but I've got to say goodbye to my family." And that's where He says about birds and foxes: *"Foxes have holes in the ground, birds have nests, but the son of man has nowhere to lay his head."* The next person says "but my father, I've got to bury my father." *"Let the dead bury their own dead."* And then He concludes by saying *"You can't start in the direction of plowing your field and look back or you're going to mess up the job you're doing."* So very tough gospel story and one that many Christians are uncomfortable with this story because of Jesus. He's not being very nice.

So what's the challenge to us? What are we supposed to take from this? One of the key phrases in the gospel that jumped out at me was that Jesus had set His face to Jerusalem. So what does that mean? Jesus is moving in the direction of his own purpose-the reason for His existence. He is a man on a mission and the mission is to Jerusalem. We know what happens there and that's where He's going. I believe what we're learning from this

text today is that when we're called to our purpose, we must stop with excuses. We must not be afraid of being rejected as Jesus was. In other words, we have to stop being nice sometimes and move in that direction. Sometimes we're so nice that we get caught up and derailed in the purpose that we're being called to. I don't think it's saying be rude, but it's saying be focused and be stuck on your purpose.

Many of you know I do a lot of coaching. And in coaching the Millennial Generation, one thing I've noticed is that they're very nice. But they've also expressed a concern as they go to achieve your purpose. They say "I don't want to be disliked by anybody. I want to be nice. Time Magazine called the Millennial Generation -Generation nice. And they said "I just don't want to offend anybody, but they want to do great things and they want to follow their purpose but sometimes that leads to rejection, sometimes that means being very direct. This is where we're going, you have to follow now.

This last week I was in San Francisco at the Breakthrough Institute Conference called the Breakthrough Dialogue and it brings together mainly Climate Change Experts on what are the solutions to climate change, an area where I'm particularly ignorant so I'm always learning a lot in the discussions. And during one of the discussions one of the scientists said "Well I got into this field of Climate Change because I think it's my purpose and I think it's going to save the world and I'm into it. And in the process I concluded as a scientist that the only solution was nuclear energy. And I am fighting for nuclear energy to achieve climate change. And so she saw that she started following her purpose but then she reported something else in her environmental friend group, she got ostracized. She got kicked out of groups. Her friends de-friended her: Dinner parties, work, she was cut off the list. She said "I'm stunned; I really thought we could have a discussion about it. But because she took a position that was counter to the conventional wisdom, she had to sacrifice something which is often true to our purpose. And then just a few weeks, a month ago rather, I was at the national Council of Churches gathering for the Unity of Christian Gathering that is done there and they had a speaker who was an evangelical.

And he was one of the founders and leaders of the Pro-Life Movement and through prayer and discernment for a variety of reasons, he said "I concluded that limiting guns was a pro-life issue. And he was the cheer of an Environmental Council and he said "I believed it; I believed it was consistent with my morals, but I was terrified. If I told people this position, I could lose my Chairmanship of the Council, I could lose my funding and to his courageous decision he came out on gun control. And he did it he lost money. And he did, he got kicked off of one of the Councils. Another Council kept him on.

The point I'm trying to say here today is not so much about what's the solution on climate change or what's the solution on guns, but what impressed me about both of these people was their moral courage to run against the grain; to say "I'm sorry I'm not gonna be nice necessarily, I'm on a path, I've got to go. I can't get caught up in excuses and so if that makes you uncomfortable, so be it." I think we have to be willing to risk more of that. In the church itself, very often the Christian Church, there are people who are so nice to a fault that we're really almost ineffectual in the world. Maybe it's time for the church to take more positions that might run counter to the culture at times and be brave on key issues. And be willing to do what Jesus is calling in the story which is sacrifice. I'm asking you to sacrifice something- to follow your call and to follow your purpose. And I think that's the message for all of us in our lives. Maybe you do or don't know what your purpose is or in the language of our church we use the word "use;" the place where you're most useful in the world. Getting clear on that is incredibly important and then praying to God for the moral courage to follow that call is what being a disciple is all about.

Amen.