

June 27, 2010

Luke 9:51-62

### “Walking on the Way”

More than ten years ago I was invited to a seminar for clergy on preparing for retirement. I thought this was a little strange, until I noticed that the invitation was for persons who would be retiring in 20 years or less. That barely included me, but I was intrigued. I spoke to my husband about attending together. He was dubious. “They are going to tell us how to handle our assets wisely for our future, but since we really have no assets, what’s the point of going?” I replied that since most clergy are also somewhat asset challenged, there must be more to what we’d learn than just handling money. And there was. The seminar was very helpful in numerous ways. But we did learn how important it is to invest at least some money during the years of active employment. So we did. And our Roth IRA’s have, since that point, steadily declined in value.

We have a pretty dismal record in the area of property investments also. In 1978 we bought a small townhome in Bolingbrook. We sold it nearly 7 years later for barely more than the price we paid for it. Shortly after that, we bought a house in Decatur, IL, and ended up deeding it back to the bank in lieu of foreclosure around the time I began ministry. We couldn’t sell it in the depressed market in Decatur at that time.

We are not sure what the message is for us in these events. We are still prayerfully seeking wisdom in our decisions about investments, since we are now drawing much closer to retirement. It makes me think of how kids often struggle with money. Allowance money is saved for the coveted toy truck or bracelet, then two days after the items are finally purchased, they are left discarded under the bed or in a dresser drawer. Was the toy worth the investment?

We make various kinds of investments in life, and we hope for a meaningful return. But often the return is less than expected. What is really worth our wholehearted investment? Aren’t the returns on many investments more mysterious and full of meaning that a quick glance can reveal? Think about it--- We invest in our kids; are the diplomas they receive the reason we invested in them? We invest in our spouses—is it because we’re hoping for some nice anniversary dinners in the future? We invest in our friends—are the invitations to their homes the reason we do? We invest in our church—so

we can see fresh paint and decent carpeting in our offices and meeting rooms- right?

It's pretty obvious that these reasons don't even touch on the incredible blessings we receive in return for investments in children, spouses, friends, and the church. Jesus knew about this. He knew that the measurable "returns" on investments are not the most important. In our Scripture for today, Jesus gave some "investment advice" to people who were following him.

Jesus warned these prospective followers that the nature of discipleship is different than it may first appear. Each of the three seekers saw their commitment to Jesus as a one-time investment that would bring some immediate return. But Jesus taught them it doesn't work like that. To be a follower of Jesus is an investment that must be lived day by day, every day, throughout our lives. It's a commitment to Walking a special Way- with Jesus. Rev. Leonard Sweet describes this "walk" as having three components:

- 1- Walk Along
- 2- Walk Away
- 3- Walk On

The first disciple offers to follow Jesus "wherever you go!" Jesus replied that he really wasn't going to a specific destination. The fact that he had nowhere to lay his head—meant that in this world he had no permanent home- he wasn't going to a specific place. Discipleship is not about DESTINATION. It's about the journey itself. God calls us to a TRIP, not a TEA-PARTY. Sure, we may find stopping places on the road, scenic overlooks, rest areas. But none of them are places where we're to STAY.

You've heard about sharks-right? In order to keep breathing, to oxygenate their gills, they have to keep moving all the time. Their gill slits lack the fluttering fins found in most fish, that constantly direct a stream of water over the gills. So, sharks have to swim—their movement through the water sends it flowing through their gills to keep them alive.

Investment in Jesus isn't a one-time thing. We make the investment every day by walking, by staying on the move, with Jesus leading the way. The promise of return on our investment? You will spend your life traversing

new terrain and fresh and untried paths. NEVER A DULL MOMENT—it's a promise! WALK ALONG! KEEP MOVING!

The second seeker wanted to “close out” a previous “account” before he'd be free to invest in serving Jesus. A number of Bible scholars agree that this man's desire to go home to bury his father was likely not a simple need to literally provide funeral services for a parent who had died. The words imply that the man's father was not yet dead, and he wanted to go home, continue to meet his dad's expectations UNTIL his father's death. THEN, once that was resolved, and his estate was settled, THEN he could follow Jesus. Friends, this man's struggle is our struggle.

Let me illustrate by thinking about giving to the church. (This is just one example- there are many others, but this one seems clear and easy to understand.)

When we are children, we may give out of our allowance to the church, probably because a parent teaches (or forces) us to do so.

But when it becomes truly our own decision—what often happens?

As young adults, in college, in entry-level jobs—we think, “I don't really have enough money to give to the church yet—I have school tuition, or loans to pay, I earn barely enough to pay my rent. I'll give to the church LATER, when I'm more established.”

As adults raising young children, we think--- “I don't really have enough money to give to the church yet—the kids need so much—clothes and food cost more than you'd think, to say nothing of braces and glasses and summer camp and music lessons. I'll give to the church LATER, when they are more independent.”

As adults whose kids are nearly grown, we think, “College tuition is out of sight, and nowadays young people can't possibly afford to buy a home without a little help from family—They have unexpected needs with cars that break down. I'll give to the church LATER, when they are more established.”

As adults nearing retirement, we think, “Oh, my gosh, how on earth am I going to manage to live on my pension and social security? Health costs are

out of sight, even WITH medical insurance. I'll give to the church LATER, once I've put away what I'll need."

As adults who have retired, we think, "Well, it's not easy living on a fixed income. I can barely make ends meet. I'm sure God understands my situation—he wouldn't expect me to give now."

Jesus calls us to walk away from all that the world says we need to handle, in order to put him first. Walk away from "death" into "life". We are called to care about God's kingdom, about God's ways reaching far beyond just ourselves and our loved ones. In Leonard Sweet's words: "[Disciples] are called to be in the midst of politics, in the midst of economics, in the midst of social change, in the midst of health crises, in the midst of .....the aged." Again, we are promised NEVER A DULL MOMENT! Jesus calls us to WALK AWAY from the world's priorities, to KEEP GROWING into his likeness.

The third potential follower claims he is ready to follow Jesus, but like the second, is still focused on previous investments. He knows the rewards he has received from those: his community, his family, their traditions and habits. How can he try something new without their blessing? But Jesus still says, "Come!" If we are to wait for others to understand us, to approve of us before we make a move in our Christian walk, we are, like the sharks, risking suffocation and death. Jesus calls us to walk on—to move into the next curve in the road, to step into the unknown future, all the while trusting and believing in the promises of the kingdom of God.

Sisters and brothers, Jesus is beside you on the road of life. He invites you to make a commitment to him. But this commitment, though it may happen in a moment, is followed by his call, "Follow me!" And the FOLLOWING does not happen in a moment. The FOLLOWING is a lifetime investment. The return is LIFE: the abundant life now, eternal life forever.

Can you hear him calling? He is saying:  
Walk along—keep moving; don't stop  
Walk away---leave behind the world's priorities and demands  
Walk on--- keep believing in God's presence and his promises.

The return on the investment you make in following Christ will be greater than you have ever imagined. Let's head out—the open road is waiting