

November 2, 2014 The Price Tag Luke 9:57-62

Anniversary Services are in my opinion extremely special. I have never done this, but there is a place in my psyche which suggests to me that it is appropriate to have all of those present, reaffirm our profession of faith in Jesus. To reaffirm our profession of faith in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in keeping, not only with Presbyterian traditions and doctrine, but also in keeping with our acceptance of the Historic Creeds and Confessions recognized by The Presbyterian Church In Canada. The idea is surely a valid one, as it reminds us that we are a Biblically based group of Christians.

I am not going to do that, and I do not want anyone to feel uncomfortable. I recall that when I was leading Amberlea Presbyterian Church in Pickering, there came a point in time at which we had to “apply” to the Presbytery of East Toronto (approximately 6 months after the congregation had begun its worship life, we had to apply to the Presbytery to be recognized as a congregation in The Presbyterian Church In Canada. I composed something we called The Amberlea Covenant. It was based on The Apostle,s Creed. Each adult who wanted to be a member of the congregation signed and dated a copy of the Covenant, Presband our application for recognition of the congregation was a covering letter from myself as the “church planting missionary” with 42 of these signed covenants on behalf of those who wished to be charter members. We decided, the Session and I that we would keep this tradition alive in that the Covenant became our application form for membership thereafter. I can remember my shock when, years later one of the ministers on our denominational staff said to me that he would never join a church that required him to sign documents....which is what we do require at every ordination of a minister, and every installation service conducted by Presbyteries marking the beginning of a new ministers tenure.

What I am getting at is this. There are moments in our journey of faith as Christians, and as Christians in the Presbyterian fold, when we take time to recognize we have made a serious and life altering, life shaping commitment, publicly declaring that we are believers. For me that goes to the heart of celebrating anniversaries in the church. We acknowledge that God has been, is, and by His grace will continue to be with us, and that our response has been to be willing to be recognized as His people come what may. Hence , my choice of Luke 9:57-62.

A man said to Jesus, “I will follow you wherever you go”. And Jesus replied to him, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has no place to lay his head.” There is a cost to be paid for believing in Jesus, enough to follow him. A price to be paid. There was a price to be paid when we began this journey of faith. There was a price to pay for continuing this journey of faith with Jesus. There is a price to be paid for being associated with Jesus. A price to be paid for following Him! Jesus made it clear to this man who expressed his commitment to Jesus and did so eloquently. “I will follow you wherever you go.” I will follow you when you go to those places and people who have an evil spirit. That’s a scary place to be. I will follow you even to Jerusalem, where the opposition to Jesus is entrenched, is on its home turf, can manipulate the levers of power in the Roman Empire, can do harm to Jesus and His followers!

I will follow you wherever you go! To the moment of arrest? To the place where they beat Jesus up. To the place where they whipped him, where he lost so much blood he was just hanging on to life itself. Wherever you go Lord! Brave words. Follow Him to Calvary? I try not to think about that very much. I don't trust myself if I think about losing my life for following Jesus. I try to answer the question, will you go there? Quickly, lest thinking about it causes me to waver. Jesus made it clear that security, the things we relate to having a home of our own, having a safe place is not a part of following Him. I try to remember that when I am enjoying the warmth of my bed on a stormy night in February. Having a home is not the be-all and end-all of living in Jesus. Think about this...what the gospel reveals is that every one of those 3 years of public ministry, Jesus was aware of how His ministry would end. Good days, bad days, all days...He was journeying to Calvary. One step closer with each passing night. That's the grace of God! Poured out for you and for me.

Jesus said to another man, "Follow me!" But the man replied. "Let me go bury my father." This is the response of, "I will...but first...there is something I must go and do elsewhere, with others." Boy that's tempting. Back in 1983 I discovered my father was dying of cancer. He lived in Thunder Bay, as locals would have said, in Port Arthur. He had never mentioned his illness to me or to Barbara, or for that matter my brother who was still living at home. My mother whom I talked to every week on the phone always found a way not to answer the questions I asked about Dad's health.

And when I found out that it was cancer, and that time was short...all I was able to do was go and be there for a few days, and then I had to return to my work in Pickering, two thirds of the province away. Dad died in March of '84. I was not a lot of help. When my mother died, same story. I make excuses, I can justify myself. I can even contend that I was busy following Jesus. It's still like an open wound these many years later. O I attended the funeral. In fact I made the arrangements. It was the lack of active care for them that still eats at a portion of my soul or my mind. Jesus said the proclamation of the Kingdom of God has priority. I tend to think there must have been a better way, than the way I handled it....there is a price to be paid for commitment to Jesus, for following Him.

These seem hard sayings on the part of Jesus, because they call for singlemindedness. Purpose and conviction. Another man said to Jesus, I will follow you, Lord. But first let me go and say goodbye to my family. That seems to be so reasonable a request doesn't it. And yet once again, what it comes down to, bottom line is this....I will follow you Lord But.... Jesus says to this man....no buts. Follow me...that is the issue. No buts...no reservations....as the chorus says, "No turning back, no turning back.

One of my classmates at Seminary, Knox College, Toronto, said to me, "Sometimes you scare me when you conduct chapel service." We would each get a turn about twice a year. "I was surprised and taken aback. "What could I have said that would scare you?" I asked. I hadn't threatened him with violence. I hadn't set out to threaten him in any way. He said to me, "You always call for radical commitment to Jesus Christ." It was during the final weeks of final year. We would soon be ordained ministers. We would soon be leading churches. We would soon be preachers of the Gospel in the legal terms of this denomination. I have never forgotten his words.

Radical commitment to Jesus does not mean promoting violence. It means being rooted in Jesus. Rooted in the Gospel. Being willing to spend one's life in His service. One of the greatest accomplishments of my years in seminary was a study of the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Christian martyr of the 2nd World War. He was executed in grizzly fashion by the Nazis during the closing hours of that conflict....when the leadership of the Reich knew the war was lost. Bonhoeffer followed Jesus...no buts...no excuses...no hesitation. I do not wish to be a martyr. I do desire on a day like today to stand up for Jesus in a world that treasures material well being, ridicules faith, and is suspicious that the church is more than anything corrupt. I want to be fit for service in the Kingdom of God...no turning back...no turning back.....no matter the price.

Let us pray;

Lord I thank you for those who have served you in the past in this sanctuary. For 160 years you have sustained the work that bears your name in this place. We pray that we might in our time continue the work and the ministry of the Kingdom of God. We desire to be worthy of the description that we followed Jesus. Bless your work. Be with your people. Sustain us unto the end, and Jesus 2nd coming. Amen