

At the 9:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. worship service there was a reference to the fruits of the Spirit in the windows at the church.*

Jesus' message in this Gospel is clear: say yes even when it is uncomfortable.

When hearing this section of Luke's Gospel, it is good to remember his overall message, his thesis is: to care for the poor, oppressed, and marginalized in society. This is the reason that he is in Samaria, seemingly enemy territory: he is ready to sacrifice everything so that the body of Christ on earth can grow to include everyone.¹

Much of the large portion of this section (9:51-chapter 18) can be found in the other synoptic Gospels: Matthew and Mark. It leads theologians to believe that the texts are derived from a more singular source and then retold in one community.²

We immediately have conflict within this text because of the tensions between the Jews and Samaritans. These cultural differences meant that Jesus' followers needed to warn those ahead of him, because they knew that Jesus would not be welcome.³ In fact, if Jesus had gone into the Samaritan village, as a Jew, with twelve other Jewish men, this would have been a sign of aggression. They might have killed all the disciples and our Anointed One.⁴ To me, This is the same way in which we know Christ prepares our hearts: gently, not with aggression.

There are times when the cost of following Jesus' ministry feels too high. Still, we are invited to give, huge, unrestricted 'yes' to Jesus.

It is natural to want to tidy up loose ends, Jesus tells his disciples, and us, in this scripture that we are to put the mission of the church above those desires. The cost is higher for the disciples than they ever could have imagined. In fact, they will give their very life.

Typically when Jesus calls someone to follow "the way", they go without resistance. In our Gospel scripture today there are several qualified yes', which is a change from the call stories in Mark and Matthew. Here, the aspirants are not unwilling, they simply want to meet their cultural obligations sooner. The challenge of this message is that Jesus would like his followers to come to him regardless of previous cultural and religious laws. Jesus is the embodied word of God.⁵

If we were to read this Gospel in Ancient Greek, the section we just read about Jesus and his disciples would look and sound different than previous sections. Much like when I quote from an author, or the Gospel, my voice and cadence change. Luke's Gospel changes. It is no longer the style of Mark; it is as though Luke is portraying something specific with his words.

The original Greek word that is translated as "taken up" is particularly interesting, *analēmpsis*, only occurring in this form here in the New Testament. The word typically means heavenly glory and majesty and in late Jewish literature it can mean death.⁶ It is interesting to think that Jesus is preparing not only for his death, or even his ascension.

¹ Andrews, L.L. (2022). *Christian Century*.

<https://www.christiancentury.org/article/living-word/june-26-ordinary-13c-luke-951-62?reload=1654634505307>

² A modern example of this would be a news story that was originally published on the associated press then republished on BriteBart or NPR.

³ Edwards, J.R. (2015). *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Luke*. Nottingham: Apollos.

⁴ Hendriksen, W. (1978). *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic. pp.552-566

⁵ Edwards, J.R. (2015). *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Luke*. Nottingham: Apollos.

⁶ Edwards, J.R. (2015). *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Luke*. Nottingham: Apollos.

At this moment, Jesus is looking for more than simply his death and resurrection, he is preparing his disciples for this new church that will come through.

Part of the unpacking of this scripture is a warning. It is easy, and sometimes very tempting to use this passage as one of judgment. I would remind us, and myself included, that we are not called to be creatures of judgment. Rather, we are called to be God's representatives of love.

When I look at this scripture, I look to myself and my life. What am I putting before Christ that makes my relationship with God more difficult? In what ways am I overly exuberant and enthusiastic, making me blind to the challenges of a situation or a person and therefore a poorer disciple of Christ? This is not a self-flagilization, rather it is a moment of reflection. This verse charges each one of us to ask how we are furthering Christ's mission in the world.⁷

When we look at someone's face, we often know their thoughts. It is what makes poker such an interesting game. We look at the face of one of our opponents and discern how we are going to play their hands. Or so I am told. Given my ability to hide my feelings, I abstain from poker, despite friends who would like me to play - because they know that they would win. Jesus' face is just as obvious as mine at a late night poker match: his cards are on the table. He is preparing for sorrow through service to others. Jesus asks the disciples to say yes to this mission as well.

Unsurprisingly, many of his followers are not interested in him. He tries enticing others along the way only to find that they are interested in what I call the qualified yes, "yes, but..." This is not a request for dinner, this is the opportunity of a lifetime, and many people are not interested in giving up their earthly lives for this ministry!⁸

Sometimes life's challenges bring us opportunities for great blessings. This does not mean that God is giving us times of difficulty, rather that in those challenging times we can choose to find God in new ways. God wants us whole and happy, he gives us instructions and ways to engage to keep us safe.⁹

It is the reason why, I respect the disciples turned martyrs, they put aside their personal well being for the needs of the Jesus' ministry. We are sometimes called, for Christ's sake, to say yes without reservation so that his vision of caring for the poor and oppressed can be carried out in our world.¹⁰

Jesus ends with a bit of humor. If you have ever tried to plow and look back, you know what will happen: you will fall on your backside and look like a fool. With modern plows you may look a bit injured as well!¹¹

Jesus calls us to put his vision first, which is a struggle when we have so many other tempting options: time at the gym, going to the movies, a trip to the zoo are much more enticing than serving at a local soup kitchen. And still, the call of Christ is to give up our luxury for his mission.

⁷ Andrews, L.L. (2022). *Christian Century*.

<https://www.christiancentury.org/article/living-word/june-26-ordinary-13c-luke-951-62?reload=1654634505307>

⁸ Hendriksen, W. (1978). *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic. pp.552-566

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¹⁰ Edwards, J.R. (2015). *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Luke*. Nottingham: Apollos.

¹¹ Hendriksen, W. (1978). *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic. pp.552-566

We have seen this done throughout history: Mother Teresa of Calcutta lived in radical poverty. She could have been nicely situated in a convent. Instead, she served communities of lepers. Just as Jesus did.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer gave his life to try to rid the world of Hitler's evil. He followed the command to seek Christ without question.

The Reverend Pauli Murray gave up the life of a lawyer when she became the first Female African American priest in the Episcopal Church.

God is asking us to give up our comforts and other demands in order to follow Christ's ways and not worry about our earthly obligations.

We are challenged through this scripture to a time of self-reflection. I will warn against shame, Jesus here is not saying we are bad, he is saying, as humans it is easy to forget that our focus is to be on Jesus' mission rather than our own.

We are called to radical hospitality despite the way in which it makes us uncomfortable, because this is the way toward Christ.

When we know God's will, feel the turning of the Spirit leading us in a particular direction it is nearly impossible to do anything else except for following God. When we try to do so, we end up circling back to Christ's path. When we try our own ways things tend to cave in on us. Instead, we must turn our hearts to Christ's ideals.¹² My prayer for all of us is that we fully and completely say yes to Jesus.

¹² Hendriksen, W. (1978). *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic. pp.552-566