

Walking With Jesus

Luke 9:51-62

INTRODUCTION

As many of you know, over the last several days my wife Karen and I have had the opportunity to take walking tours of a number of wonderful cities in the country of Germany.

- We visited Munich and Augsburg, Rothensburg, Bamberg, Coburg and Wittenberg and others, each day registering more than 15,000 steps on our FitBit watches. All historic cities with beautiful cathedrals and churches for the people to worship in.

Our Gospel lesson describes another walking tour – this one headed to (but not yet in) another historic and important city: Jerusalem. A city with its own beautiful place to worship, the Great Temple built by King Herod.

Our tour group consisted of 17 members. We don't know exactly how many were in that tour group but we can safely say it was much, much larger.

- We know, for example, the 12 disciples were there, because James and John – the guys nicknamed “Sons of Thunder” – vented their frustration at the lack of hospitality shown by the Samaritans.
- We also know that in the very next chapter Jesus would send out 72 of those on this walking tour ...

... two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. (Luke 10:1).

- Furthermore we know that there were at least three people who were beginning to think they had walked far enough.

We don't get the impression that these three followers were “first timers,” that is, that they were people who sort of stumbled onto a Jesus parade and decided to see where everyone was going. Because of their openness to the invitation of Jesus to “follow” Him, we have to assume that these were people who knew that Jesus was somebody special and had been walking with Him for some time. Jesus knew them well enough to invite them.

But no matter how long they had been walking with Jesus, on this day something happened to them as they walked along. Something caused them to hesitate... to question... to think differently about what they were doing and where they were going.

The text doesn't tell us if they continued to walk with Jesus or if they left to do the things they mentioned. But it is clear from the text that their understanding of what it meant to walk with Jesus involved more than they originally expected. And they weren't 100% sure they wanted to walk with Him any more.

So that prompted my thinking this week. In my own personal walk with Jesus, and as I invite other people to begin themselves to walk with Him, what should we expect? I don't ever want to be guilty of creating unrealistic expectations for myself or for others, so if someone makes a decision to walk with Jesus, I want to be clear about what that means.

So what do I do when I have questions? I go to the text. As always, you get your answers to questions like this from within the text. What does the text say about the expectations that should be held by someone who walks with Jesus? I found three:

1. Walking with Jesus ultimately leads me to the cross.

"Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51)

Resolutely. That's a word I don't hear often. Unless it is New Year's Eve.

Even the pronunciation of it makes clear that something serious is going. Here we learn that Jesus was not just taking an afternoon stroll. This walk He was on was serious stuff.

Scholars will tell you this passage begins to tell us about the last six months of the earthly life of Jesus. So when verse 51 says "*Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem*" we are to understand that He is going to Jerusalem to die on the cross – to fulfill the purpose for which He had come to earth – to make it possible for our sins to be forgiven and for us to have eternal life with Him in heaven.

When I was a kid, we would take Sunday afternoon drives. That was back in the days when gas was not \$5.00 a gallon of course. There was never a set destination. We were just going on a drive. Now, somehow those drives always seemed to eventually end up with a frosty mug from the B&K Root Beer Stand in Wapakoneta. But most of the drive was just an aimless, relaxing drive. No other purpose behind it.

There was nothing aimless and relaxing about the stroll in our text. One Jesus "resolutely" started for Jerusalem any hint of the casual was eliminated.

- No longer was this an opportunity to spend a pretty afternoon with a delightful host who could tell a lot of creative and meaningful stories.
- It was more than being in the presence of One who could heal diseases and bring dead people back to life.
- From this point on, this was tour had a strategic purpose.

And there is the point. If I keep walking with Jesus, He is eventually going to lead me to the foot of the cross. And as I stand there, I will realize that He died there for me. It was my sin that put Him there. And I will need face those sins and make a decision.

- Do I want to turn away from Jesus and continue to live life on my own terms ...
- OR ... Do I want to turn away from my sinful ways and continue to follow Jesus?

Once the cross comes into view, some people choose to stop walking.

- They like Jesus if He talks about love and joy.
- They are really onboard if He heals them when they are sick and answers their prayers occasionally
- But they aren't all that interested in hearing that icky stuff about sin.

But on the other hand those who keep walking get to experience the joy of forgiveness. The Psalmist says it like this:

Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.
(Psalm 32:1)

But here is the truth we all must face:

You can't walk with Jesus and avoid the cross.

Expect it. Expect to be brought to that point in your journey.

2. Walking with Jesus will include a few obstacles.

But the people (Samaritans) there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. (Luke 9:53)

The most direct route from where Jesus was to Jerusalem would take Him through Samaritan territory. The Samaritans and the Jews hated each other, and most Jews would willingly add days to their journey just to avoid going that way. Not Jesus. Not this time anyway.

The streets in those old German cities where Karen and I walked were not smooth and easy. Those old European cities have retained the old cobblestone roads and walkways. Those stones made it easier for the horses to have a footing as they walked, but it complicates things for us humans. We can roll an ankle on streets like that.

Walking with Jesus is no different. Sometimes the journey is easier than others, but even the easy stretches have potential obstacles that need to be overcome. That aggravating person, that ongoing problem at work, that health issue that resurfaces, those kids...

There are times when we might find ourselves thinking, "I'm going to church. I'm reading the Bible. I thought that if I did all that, I wouldn't have to face those things." But the Bible never promises that. It does promise that Jesus will continue to be there when life's troubles happen, but never that they can be avoided.

I'm not sure who to credit with this quote, but I like it.

If there are no obstacles on the path you are taking, it is probably leading you to nowhere. (Source unknown)

In contrast, it was George Mueller – that great evangelist and operator of Ashley Down Orphanage – who said:

I say—and say it deliberately—trials, obstacles, difficulties, and sometimes defeats, are the very food of faith. (George Mueller)

Even when you walk with Jesus, there will be obstacles to overcome. Expect that.

3. Walking with Jesus often requires difficult choices. (vv. 57-62)

As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”

He said to another man, “Follow me.” But he replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”

Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.” Jesus replied, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:57-62)

Those who continue to walk with Jesus will eventually find themselves forced to make some hard choices – clarifying choices that serve to identify how important Jesus is in their lives.

These three travelers in today's text discovered that very thing. Nothing they cared about was wrong, either by our standards today or by those in Jesus' time. But Jesus wanted to make sure they understood that He matters more. Following Him is not on par with anything else in our lives. It is the most serious and significant relationship we will ever have.

It is ultimately a question of whether Jesus will be the Lord of your life or just another entertaining tour guide.

If you are walking with Jesus, you should expect to face that question in your own life. If it hasn't happened already, it will. Expect it.

APPLICATION

So the question ultimately is: Is walking with Jesus worth it? If walking with Jesus takes me to cross and doesn't insulate me from problems and forces me to make hard and painful choices, why do it?

The answer is in the Galatians text. There you see a stark contrast to the kind of life lived by someone who walks with Jesus and someone who doesn't. That contrast is captured in the opening phrases of verses 19 and 22.

But I like the way it is expressed in *The Message*.

It is obvious what kind of life develops out of trying to get your own way all the time: repetitive, loveless, cheap sex; a stinking accumulation of mental and emotional garbage; frenzied and joyless grabs for happiness; trinket gods; magic-show religion; paranoid loneliness; cutthroat competition; all-consuming-yet-never-satisfied wants; a brutal temper; an impotence to love or be loved; divided homes and divided lives; small-minded and lopsided pursuits; the vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival; uncontrolled and uncontrollable addictions; ugly parodies of community. I could go on and on...

But what happens when we walk God's way? He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard—things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely...

Since this is the kind of life we have chosen, the life of the Spirit, let us make sure that we do not just hold it as an idea in our heads or a sentiment in our hearts, but work out its implications in every detail of our lives. (Galatians 5:19-25)

I agree. Amen.