

⁵¹When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. ⁵²And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; ⁵³but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. ⁵⁴When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" ⁵⁵But he turned and rebuked them. ⁵⁶Then they went on to another village.

⁵⁷As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." ⁵⁸And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." ⁵⁹To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." ⁶⁰But Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." ⁶¹Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." ⁶²Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." Luke 51-62 NRSV

All of us have goals we want to achieve in life. Perhaps there is also something that we really want to buy someday. All of these things are fine and good. Yet when we begin to start taking steps to either moving towards the goal, getting what we want, most of the time we discover "roadblocks", "obstacles", things that are a part of what we want that seem very unappealing to have to deal with.

Some years ago the actor Hugh Grant played a certain role in movies that was very irritating to me. You knew he was probably going to marry the girl, or even pledge his affection to her, but he would hem and haw throughout two-thirds of the movie because he didn't want to give up his independence. After watching this for about two-thirds into the movie I was ready to throw something at the screen and say "Get on with it already!"

When I was serving another church I was talking to a gentleman who secured big name acts for the area. One of the things he revealed that was very irritating to him was the requirements stars put in their contract. This wasn't just your usual requests, no; it might be for a certain specific kind of food, a certain kind of a dressing room, etc. When he described it I could tell that it really made him crazy to have to fulfill these 'extra' needs.

The gospel lesson for last Sunday is like that. There is God's way of dealing with situations and people versus our way. The text begins with Jesus passing through a Samaritan village on his way to Jerusalem. When the village hears that he is going through to Jerusalem, you might as well have sworn at them. They refuse passage or help. Since hospitality is of first importance, the disciples were really taken back by the villager's hostility. They want God, like the prophet Elisha did many years ago, rain fire on that inhospitable village. However this is not Jesus' plan or way. He rebukes them for such thoughts, in other words he "told them off". To their dismay, their way is not God's way.

Next we encounter three "candidates" who might potentially follow Jesus. In each case however they are cannot have discipleship with Jesus on their terms but God's. Luke doesn't tell us what they eventually decided to do, but one wonders if they ever took up the invitation simply because they couldn't give up their way for God's.

The word of my testimony is that each good blessing and opportunity that God brought my way always had something that did not appeal to me. When the first church I served initially contacted me I was not interested. I tried to focus on other opportunities available to me at the time. God practically had to "hit me over the head" to get the clear message that I was to interview with that church. Once I got there I could see it was the right one for me at the time. Now I thank God for starting me out in that particular congregation.

One of my favorite writers, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his book "Cost of Discipleship" puts it in very stark terms, "When Christ calls a man(or woman)he bids him(or her) come and die."

As God's children, God has a good plan for us, good things for us. The big thing we are going to run into every time is: "Are we willing to do it God's way?"

Pr. John Van Haneghan