

## Wesley United Methodist Church

June 30, 2019

“The Forward Look.”

Luke 9:51-62

One secret to being successful in this world is to learn how to motivate yourself as well as others. A tough old cowboy counseled his grandson that if he wanted to live a long life, the secret was to sprinkle a little gunpowder on his oatmeal every morning. The grandson did this and lived to be 93. When he died, he left 14 children, 28 grandchildren, 35 great-grandchildren and a 15-foot hold in the ceiling of the funeral home.

So, I'm not going to suggest that you sprinkle a little gunpowder on your oatmeal, but don't we all need a little extra push from time to time to help motivate us to do things we know we ought to do?

In our reading from Luke's Gospel, Jesus says to a certain man, "Follow me." But the man said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." But Jesus responded with these rather forceful words. "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Jesus expected his disciples to be totally committed. They could not straddle the fence. They could not hold on to the past at the expense of the present. He wanted them to focus on the future.

Come to think of it, we are the ones who approach Jesus and tell him that we want to follow him but cannot walk away from the lives we are leading. We say we want to be given time to put our affairs in order, to take care of those we love, to say good-bye to friends and family. But the truth is that we really don't want to let go of what we have, and we do not want to commit ourselves fully to God. Warren Wiersbe has put it like this: "You do not move ahead by constantly looking in a rear-view mirror. The past is a rudder to guide you, not an anchor to drag you down. We must learn from the past, not live in the past." Someone else said, "The past is a guide post not a hitching post." Jesus demands for total commitment seem stifling and unfair. Such a radical commitment to serve someone else goes against our nature as freedom-loving Americans, doesn't it?

This reading of the Gospel of Luke also gives us a chance to talk about freedom a few days before advertisers and politicians fill television, Facebook and Twitter with patriotic rhetoric designed to sell us everything from washers to "wisdom" from Washington. We call the Fourth of July "Independence Day" and have good reason to celebrate. We say this is the day we gained our freedom from British rule. But do the words "freedom" and "independence" really mean the same?

In Galatians 5:1, the Apostle Paul tells us, "For freedom Christ has set you free. Now make sure that you stay free." This sounds like something the authors of the Declaration of Independence would say, doesn't it? But Paul goes on, "For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become servants to one another."

Oops, it seems we've been made free only so that we can enslave ourselves. This sounds ridiculous because we think of freedom and slavery as opposites. The truth is that independence and slavery are opposites, but as I said, freedom and independence are not the same thing. One can be independent and yet not free, as was the case of the early Americans who were not free from their past of assumptions and prejudices. One can be free and yet be a servant to others, which is what Paul and Jesus are calling us to do.

So, what is true freedom? First, let me say what it is not. Freedom is not an escape from authority, from responsibility, or from obligation. Sure, authority figures, responsibilities, and obligations can feel inhibiting but to walk away from these is to be enslaved by our bodies, our minds, and our passions. Sure, authority figures, responsibilities, and obligations can feel inhibiting, but to walk away from these is to be enslaved by our bodies, our minds, and our passions. Our desires will control us such as worshiping of false gods, hatred, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, and so on. All of these arise out of our indulging our bodies, minds, and emotions. When we indulge in our bodies, minds and emotions we lose our freedom. Liberation comes when one finally releases one's own agenda and accepts God's. In our lives, we must strike a balance between security and independence, but we need to make no compromises when it comes to freedom. We are called to freedom, but we are not to use our freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence of the flesh but rather, through love, we are free to become servants of God and servants to each other. When Jesus calls us to follow him, let us walk away from our earthly bondage, be liberated with his freedom, walk away from your past and serve him by serving one another.

