

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

FIT FOR LIFE

Luke 9:51-62

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 8)

Analysis by Paige G. Evers

51 When the days drew near for [Jesus] to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. 52 And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; 53 but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. 54 When 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?" 55 But he turned and rebuked them. 56 Then they went on to another village. 57 As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." 58 And 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." 59 To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." 60 But Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." 61 Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." 62 Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

DIAGNOSIS: Not Fit for the Kingdom of God

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Reasons Not to Follow*

We have the best of intentions. "Sure, I'll follow you, Jesus,

just let me take care of some important business first. Such as waiting for my father to die (v. 59) so I don't leave him in the lurch, or worse yet, abandon my inheritance. Or putting my affairs in order and saying goodbye to those I will leave behind (v. 61)." Those are the excuses of the nameless characters in this lesson. Jesus' disciples James and John seem to have the best of intentions for their behavior as well. When the Samaritan village doesn't welcome them or allow them to get things ready for Jesus' arrival, they want revenge. Spectacular revenge. "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" (v. 54). James and John see the Samaritans offending Jesus and they intend to do something about it.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Ignoring Jesus' Voice*

Maybe the intentions of all of these characters—the nameless ones, and the "Sons of Thunder"—aren't so good after all. As they voice their excuses, they reveal the intentions of their hearts: to play it safe, or to condemn others. In both cases, their main concern is following their own will. Jesus may be calling them to follow him, but their trust lies in themselves only.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Left out of the Kingdom*

The disciples and the nameless people along the road will find that their excuses don't take them very far. James and John may feel the sting of Jesus' rebuke now (v. 55). The folks along the road might find it puzzling that Jesus contrasts his life to foxes and birds (v. 58). But those reactions are nothing compared to what these sinners will find at the end of their roads: they are not "fit for the kingdom of God" (v. 62). They are not allowed in. Outside the kingdom, they will have no choice; they will be "the dead bury[ing] their own dead" (v.

60).

PROGNOSIS: Messengers of the Kingdom of God

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Turning Point*

On their own, James, John, and the other characters in this lesson are not fit for the Kingdom of God. Neither are we. But in Christ, God makes sinners fit for his Kingdom. In Luke's gospel, 9:51 is the turning point for Jesus and for us. "When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem" (v. 51). God is at work. The passive "for him to be taken up" summarizes what God accomplishes in Jesus. He has raised his Son from death to life. The second part of that pivotal verse, "he set his face to go to Jerusalem" shows that Jesus would stop at nothing to see God's mission through. What makes us fit for the Kingdom of God? The answer is not what, but who. Jesus' death on the cross wipes away all traces of our excuses, sins, and misplaced trust. His resurrection to new life clears the way for us to enter the Kingdom (unencumbered by our self will).

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Set Free*

Now that Jesus has gone to Jerusalem and beyond it to Golgotha, the grave, and the garden, we can trust him with our whole heart. We're not stuck in our "holes" or our "nests" (v. 58) any longer. We're not looking back (v. 62). We're not consumed with the desire for fire to come down from heaven and strike those who don't accept Jesus (or those who follow him, v. 53). Our hearts have been made fit for the Kingdom. We are free to follow the One who calls us.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Go and Proclaim*

Not only are we now fit for the Kingdom and called to follow the King, but we are also commissioned as his messengers. "As for you," Jesus says, "go and proclaim the kingdom of God" (v. 60). Jesus' face was set toward Jerusalem; as disciples of the

crucified and risen One, our faces are set toward those with whom we share the good news—that in Christ they have been made fit for the Kingdom of God.