

Sermon Preached on
Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
(June 26, 2016)
"Eyes Forward"

I think we can best understand today's Gospel with a little experiment.

First, have a volunteer walk forward while looking back. Now, walk with eyes focused forward on the cross. Okay, which way worked better? Exactly.

It's like my driver's education teacher used to tell us: wherever you focus your eyes, that's where you will go. So, when you're driving a 2,000 pound car - keep your eyes forward!

This concept of keeping your eyes forward was important to Jesus, too. Because Jesus had a hard job ahead, and he needed helpers he could depend on.

That's why, when one guy said he'd follow, Jesus said, "foxes have holes and birds have nest, but not us. We have nothing. Can you deal with that?"

One guy to whom Jesus said "Follow me" wanted to. But he said "First, let me go and bury my father." This seems reasonable, right? What kind of heartless person wouldn't let a guy bury his father first.

The problem is, the way this is written (in the Greek, that is), the father probably isn't dead yet. Or even sick! What he's probably saying is more like: "I'd love to follow - and I will - after dad's gone, of course, because he needs me now." In other words, never.

You gotta worry about this guy being on an important mission if he's always looking back and wondering if he should have stayed with dad.

Now, at this moment, you might say to yourself, "Wait a minute, what about Elisha: he went back to his parents."

And so he did. AND Elijah allowed it.

BUT there's a big difference... He went back to burn his plow and sacrifice the oxen - to sever ties. From this point on, he would be focused on service to God alone.

If only that potential disciple could have thought back to Elisha and been like him.

But wait... The next fellow Jesus talks to does sound a lot like Elisha. He comes up to Jesus and says, "I will follow you, but first let me say goodbye to my family." And once again, Jesus seems kind of harsh. "Whoever puts his hand to the wheel and looks back is not fit for the kingdom of God."

What's going on? In a word, motivation. Jesus sees this guy's offer for what it is: He sounds like that famous moment with Elisha maybe because he sees himself as the next Elisha. In other words, he's having delusions of grandeur. He already sees himself as the new super-prophet.

So with this one little passage, we learn some very important things about following Jesus:

1. It's hard.
2. You have to stay focused on what your mission is - you can't keep looking back.
3. It's not about personal gain, whether in fame or fortune. If you're in it to look good, this is the wrong job.

Now, who is Jesus talking about when he says, "Follow me"? Sounds like maybe it's just apostles or missionaries or ... I don't know, priests these days? Nope. He's talking about all of us. Following Jesus in any capacity is hard, not for the faint of heart. If you're following faithfully, you don't get wealthy from it, you don't get famous from it, and you don't get sidetracked.

But you do come closer to the kingdom of God with every step. Not that there aren't confusions and complication and mistakes along the way. Look at how badly the disciples messed up at the beginning of the gospel - wanting to destroy people just because they didn't believe them. But Jesus taught them better, and they learned.

And maybe that's the biggest lesson of all. If you keep your eyes and heart focused on Jesus, you won't go too far astray. And if you do forget and get lost, you can regain your bearings. Just look to Jesus because he will always be there to see. Amen.