

**Luke 9:51-62 (Third Sunday after Pentecost—Series C)****“Fit and Well-Placed”****Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield CT****June 26, 2022**

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text is the Gospel lesson from Luke 9:

When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him. But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" But he turned and rebuked them. And they went on to another village. As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." 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." To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." And Jesus said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Yet 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 his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

The summer months often inspire people to get fit. Some people began getting fit as a New Year's resolution, looking forward to those long days at the pool, those rugged hikes at camp, and the enjoyment of the great outdoors. To be fit requires focus. Today, Jesus shows us that He is fit to face the future that the Father had for Him, fit for the work that the Father had given Him to do—to die for us and rise again for our life. He never loses His focus. He wants people to follow Him and Him alone. Those who look back and get tied down to the things of the world are not fit for the kingdom of God.

Jesus is fit. He is well-placed. His holy incarnation had Him placed in the world, homeless. He was well-placed in a manger to be our salvation. He was well placed in the heart of His mother. He was well-placed in the temple and with His ancestry. He was well-placed in Galilee. He was well-placed by His Father to heal people, cleanse people, teach people, and even raise the dead.

Jesus is fit for Jerusalem; He is well-placed there for us and for our salvation. He turns His face to Jerusalem. His eyes are toward the city of God. He is fit to go forward, no matter what else may distract Him. He is fit for the cross, to suffer and die so that we may have life in His name through His perfect sacrifice. Jesus is fit for a tomb that was ours. He is fit for the resurrection, walking in resurrection fitness with the Emmaus disciples and revealing Himself to them in the breaking of the bread. He is fit for heaven as He ascends in glory.

Jesus looks for followers who are fit to be His disciples, who will journey with Him from death to life. He desires well-placed people in the world who will forsake all and follow Him. Jesus meets many people who do not have that focus. He sends messengers to a village of the Samaritans who do not receive Him because he is fit and focused. But rejection does not stop Him. Would-be followers of Jesus want to follow Him on their own terms. One wants to bury his father first. The other wants to bid farewell to his family (part of respectable Jewish tradition.) But Jesus does not want people looking back when they follow Him. If they do, they are not fit for the kingdom of God. Jesus expects people to follow Him faithfully and leave everything else behind. No one having put his hand on the plow and looking back at things behind him is fit or well-placed for the kingdom of God. Jesus wants followers to look ahead to the city of peace. Excuses tied to the priorities of the world will not be tolerated in Kingdom work.

Our sin is what makes us out of shape, unfit to be followers of Jesus Christ. In our sin, we take our focus off the Lord. We prioritize other things before the Lord. When we look back when following, we will not travel straight and will wander off the track. A piano teacher was advising his student who was playing. The student arrived at a difficult measure and didn't play it perfectly. He let the mistake affect his confidence and concentration for the rest of the piece. His teacher stopped him and asked, "Can you drive a car looking only in the rearview mirror?" "No,"

replied the student. "It's the same with playing piano," explained the teacher. "You can't play looking in the rearview mirror. Play to the cadence. Just keep going forward. After all, you can't live life looking in the rearview mirror." How true this is for us. Christ calls us to keep going forward by following Him, not turning back to past mistakes. In the Gospel, Jesus challenges us not to bury people or bid farewell to family. If we do other things, we're bound to get off track and make more mistakes. We do not follow Jesus by looking everywhere else. Jesus expects exclusivity. When we look in the rearview mirror, looking behind, we violate the First Commandment and are "unfit" to be Christ's disciples. In our sin, we do not leave behind the things of the world but often embrace them.

But Jesus forgives us our sin and sends us His Spirit so that we may follow Him. Through His death on the cross and His resurrection, Jesus saves us from sin, death, and the devil. In Holy Baptism, we die and rise with Christ. In Holy Absolution, we receive forgiveness of sins in Christ. In Holy Communion, we eat and drink Christ's body and blood for life and salvation. The Holy Spirit, through these Means of Grace, directs us to follow Jesus. When you and I walk by the Spirit, we do not gratify the desires of the flesh. We live and walk by the Spirit in "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23), putting to death the ways of the flesh that distract us from God.

Only in Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit are we "fit" to follow Christ. Fitness to follow comes only from God. We have been "outfitted" with the robe of Christ's righteousness in Holy Baptism. We are made fit for the feast of victory, where we receive Jesus' body and blood at every Lord's Supper. We are fit and well-placed today in the assembly of the faithful to receive Christ's gifts in Word and Sacraments. Here we celebrate Jesus' fitness, His focus on the cross to bring us salvation so that we may share this Good News with the world.

We are well-placed for the present, encouraging others to focus on and follow Christ in faith. We are fit for the future—made fit by God to wait in hope for the return of Christ. “Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14). Not even earthquakes, wind, or fire can distract us as the Lord graciously reaches us in Word and Sacraments.

The noble burial of a father and the respectful blessing to family members are no excuses for a delayed following of Jesus. Christ did not even let His living accommodations prevent Him from being born for us and going to Jerusalem to suffer for us. He is the focused Son of God who was well-placed for us, bringing us from death to life. Nothing kept Him from His mission. Nothing need keep the Church from following Him. The distractions of worldliness, no matter how tempting, polite, and respectful they may seem, should not keep us from following Jesus Christ. He has lifted our eyes to the city of peace—our eternal destiny with Him. We follow in faith, having been made fit by the fit Son of God. No longer distracted, let us focus on Christ as He comes to us in his Holy Word and Sacraments in worship so that we may follow Him on the journey through this vale of tears on the great exodus from death to life. Since Christ has saved us from preoccupation with this world, let us live our lives focused on following Him who alone makes us fit to follow Him faithfully from death to life. Amen.