

Proper 8C (Pentecost 5), 2010

Text: Luke 9:51-62

Title: Excuses

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There's no such thing as a good excuse. Believe me, I've heard my share. Particularly when it comes to church attendance. From sports to scouts to work to vacation to family to just being tired and lazy, there's no such things as a good excuse. If you love Jesus, you'll find a way to be with Him and the rest of His body every week. If you're sick, the church comes to you. If you're out of town, there will likely be a church wherever you go. If Sunday mornings are impossible, there are churches with services at other times. So no matter where you are, you should be able to find an opportunity to gather together with the people of God. But that doesn't stop people from making excuses.

Jesus hears several excuses in the gospel lesson today. "My Father is dying, let me wait until he's gone so I can take care of the funeral." "I need to say goodbye to my family." These seem like reasonable requests. But Jesus won't let anything else come first. Not even your family. Unless you are willing to put Jesus first, then His kingdom is not for you.

And those of you who are here faithfully week after week, don't think that Jesus' words of warning don't apply to you, too. When Jesus says, "follow me," He's not just talking about an hour or so on Sunday morning, and maybe a Wednesday or two throughout the year for extra credit. Jesus is talking about an entire life devoted to Him, an entire life of following Jesus.

There are no excuses for bad behavior.

There are no excuses for acting selfishly and ignoring the needs of those around you. There are no excuses for not loving your neighbor as yourself. There are no excuses for failing to pray and meditate on God's Word. There are no excuses for unkind words and foul language. There are no excuses for impure thoughts and actions. There are no excuses for not telling other people about the great things that God has done for you.

There are no excuses for sin. Paul gives a laundry list of sin in Galatians 5, "sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these." Paul also says clearly in Romans 1 that we are without excuse for sin.

The problem with making excuses, is that sin never gets dealt with. As long as we are making excuses and giving reasons, we're justifying ourselves, we're trying to explain sin away. Sin is sin, no matter why we do it.

When we are confronted with sin, when we accused by God's law, the answer is not to make excuses. As long as we are making excuses, there is no hope for us.

When we are confronted with our sin, with our failure to follow Jesus, the answer is to confess our sin, acknowledge our sin and say “Yes, I’ve sinned. It’s my fault. There’s no one else to blame.”

This is why God gives you His law. God’s law gets rid of any sort of trust or reliance on yourself. God’s law helps you realize that you can’t do it on your own. And once you realize that you can’t do it on your own, the only one left to rely on is Jesus Christ.

And Jesus doesn’t make excuses.

If anyone had the right to make excuses, it was Jesus Christ. But He does the opposite.

Notice how our gospel reading begins, “When the days drew near for Jesus to be taken up, He set his face to go to Jerusalem.”

Now when it says “taken up,” there’s a lot packed into that verb. We all know what happened to Jesus when He went to Jerusalem. We all know what would take place in the days and weeks leading to the time when Jesus was taken up.

Jesus would enter Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, amidst the song and shouts of the people.

Jesus would eat one last meal with His disciples on Thursday night, and then be betrayed by one of them.

Jesus would be arrested, tried, beaten, mocked, humiliated, whipped, and nailed to a cross to die.

Jesus also knew that this would happen. When Jesus set His face to go to Jerusalem, He knew that He was going to His death, and yet He still went. He was determined to go.

Jesus didn’t make any excuses. Jesus didn’t complain. Jesus didn’t think up reasons not to go. He could have. He could have come up with dozens of reasons why he shouldn’t have to go to Jerusalem to die. But Jesus went. He obeyed His Father’s will. No excuses.

It was not any easy road. Jesus encountered opposition along the way. The folks in a certain town of Samaria didn’t welcome him into town. James and John wanted the town burned to the ground, but Jesus simply moved on.

Jesus invited folks to come along with Him, but all Jesus got was excuses. It’s understandable. It’s tough being a disciple. No one said it was an easy life. Jesus said, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.” Being a disciple means a never being at home in this world, never being at rest or at peace. Life in the Kingdom of God is tough.

So far, in the past three weeks, we’ve seen whom Jesus draws into the kingdom. Three weeks ago it was the dead boy and his widowed mother. We saw how Jesus raises the dead and gives life. Two weeks ago it was the sinful woman who came weeping at Jesus’ feet. We saw how

Jesus forgives sin and gives peace. Last week it was the demon possessed man. We saw how Jesus drove out the demons and put him back in His right mind.

That's who Jesus draws into His kingdom- the dead, the sinners, and the demon-possessed. These are the kinds of people Jesus has come for. In each of these people we have seen ourselves. Spiritually dead, sinners, those in the kingdom of evil one.

That's what Deangelo was when his parents brought him here this morning. Spiritually dead, a sinner, and under the dominion of the evil one.

But God changed all that. To the dead, He gives new life. To the sinner, He gives forgiveness. To those with evil spirits, He fills with His Holy Spirit.

So it was for Deangelo, and so it was for each of you. In Holy Baptism, God gave you new life, forgave you, and filled you with His Holy Spirit.

Because of the Holy Spirit, your life is changed. You bear the fruit of the Spirit- love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Derrick, Danielle, you will see these qualities in Deangelo. You will see him loving, rejoicing, and making peace, you will see him being patient, kind and good, he will be faithful, gentle, and self-controlled. All of these things will be a result of the Holy Spirit at work in him, because he has been baptized.

It's not easy to follow Jesus. It's much easier to make excuses and just do things your own way. It's easier to follow the desires of your own flesh.

The only way for your life to change is through the Holy Spirit. And remember, Spirit is breath is word. The Holy Spirit gets into you through God's Word. Word and water (Holy Baptism), Word and bread and wine (Holy Communion), Word and Pastor (Holy Absolution). If you lack love, joy, peace, patience, kindness goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, then come to be filled with the Holy Spirit, come to listen and to eat.

So, no more excuses. Follow Jesus. Love your neighbor. Don't give in to your desires. If that sounds impossible, good. You're starting to get it.

When you fail, and you will, don't make excuses. Confess your sins. And trust in Jesus. He went to Jerusalem to die and rise for you. And He has sent you His Holy Spirit.