

Hand To The Plow

Luke 9:51-62

When the days drew near for him to be taken up,
Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem.

And he sent messengers ahead of him.

On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans
to make ready for him; but they did not receive him,
because his face was set toward Jerusalem.

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?”

But Jesus turned and rebuked them.

Then 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, first let me go and bury my father.”

But Jesus said to him, “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.”

Hand To The Plow

Luke 9:51-62

June 29, 2025

Rev. Michael P. Catanzaro

I.

It was my hope for today's sermon that we might start moving into a more relaxed homiletical direction as is befitting a summer Sunday. Not necessarily fluff, mind you, but certainly a little bit less intense. Of course, that was my very intent two weeks ago when I last preached, but we all know how *that* turned out. The truth is, *every* sermon should necessarily be dictated by circumstances, both as the world unfolds and Spirit discloses. Preaching is less about saying what you *want* to say (or what others seek to hear) which only serves to *reinforce* the dominant narrative, and more about saying what *needs* to be said (or listened to by others) at any given time so as to *change* the narrative. Of course, then there is a sermon like today's which speaks to an entirely *new* narrative being foisted upon us as life is only ever about the next shoe that drops. Before we get into all of that, however, let's talk about today's text from Luke ch. 9.

II.

In broad strokes, the chapter falls toward the end of Jesus' earthly ministry and concerns itself with preaching and displaying the Kingdom of God including the Apostolic mission and commissioning, the feeding of the 5,000, the Transfiguration and, here in verses 51 through 62, the cost of Discipleship and Jesus' journey to Jerusalem.

Specific to this morning's text, Jesus and his disciples arrive at a Samaritan village and are rebuffed. While the Jews and Samaritans always had a kind of "cats and dogs" relationship (which, in part, is what makes the parable of the Good Samaritan so poignant) this particular village did not receive him because they discerned "his face was set toward Jerusalem," home to the Jewish temple, rather than the competing Samaritan temple and center of their worship located on nearby Mount Gerizim. While the Disciples argued for the "nuclear" option of bringing fire down upon them Jesus, instead, rebuked the Disciples for their petty vengefulness and simply moved on. He had bigger fish to fry.

III.

Soon they arrive at another village, and someone there said to Jesus, “I will follow you wherever you go.” To which Jesus offers the caution, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” Which had just been so aptly demonstrated by our Samaritan friends.

Then, seemingly by way of illustration, Jesus calls to some *other* person there saying, “Come and follow me.” When this person wants, first, to go and bury their father, Jesus replies, “Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”

Finally, yet *another* in the crowd offers to follow Jesus...just as soon as they say farewell to those at their home. To which Jesus says, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” Here, then, in these mere 11 verses Jesus encapsulates what many of us have already discovered: Discipleship is *Hard*.

IV.

While today’s text has historically been used to paint a very daunting, if not outright grim, picture of Discipleship, I would like to offer a slightly different take. One which not only counts the *cost* of Discipleship, but affirms that when it comes to our faith we get that for which we *pay*.

Other people *will* not, or simply *cannot*, appreciate our priorities as people of faith. This does not mean that our priorities are in any way wrong or inappropriate, but it does mean we will necessarily always opt for quality over quantity, define ourselves by less rather than more, and seek a greater depth than most.

There are a lot of “Brer Rabbits” in the world, both people and issues, endeavoring to tempt us with tar babies which only serve to suck us in and get us stuck. In the words of philosopher Frederich Nietzsche, “Our fate is not to swat at flies.” Recognize that such flies take many forms, including a sense of vengeance, both petty and righteous, which springs forth from a sense of justice which has become devoid of both compassion and prime concern.

V.

While we all enjoy the comfort and security of hearth and home, home is only ever where the heart is. If the aim is a sense of belonging, we should never settle for easiest way to be so. If we have heart, we will always have a home.

While it is a comfort to abide in the past our fate lies ahead in the future. Yes, our families certainly shape us, wonderfully so, but ultimately they do not define us. The world is more than we ever possibly realize and our lives more meaningful than we are often willing, or dare, to imagine.

Finally, not only is Discipleship a *hard* road it is also a *long* road. A road which is filled with many disruptions, distractions, and misdirections which cause us to linger too long, lose our way, and forget our purpose. Regardless of how life unfolds, we need to keep our hand to plow and simply keep going. Come what may, and above all else, we simply need to keep *going*.

VI.

Now for the next shoe and the new narrative being foisted upon us. As the members of the choir are already aware, and as I will inform the Session Monday night, and you can read the following day in the church's summer newsletter, our very talented, much beloved, and ever hopeful Director of Music, Meg Dissinger, will be leaving us in August to assume a new position at a college on Long Island. Please know that this was not Meg's choice, and certainly not our choice. Nor was it a due to any lack of effort or accomplishment on her part; but, rather, a function of circumstances which were beyond her control.

I have been aware of this possibility for some weeks now, quietly praying and hoping against hope, as this hand which was dealt to her was playing out. Frankly, for the first little while I was in denial as the thought of her departure was simply too terrible to contemplate. Certainly for Meg and her family, but for our church as well.

VII.

The good news is Meg has landed on her feet (as I knew she would). That is the most important part of this story. The bad news, however, is our church now finds itself in a bit of a pickle (again). There are *not* a lot of people out there who are even able to *do* the job of Choir Director and Pianist here at our church, and almost certainly not as well as Meg, let alone with the same degree of joy she has brought to the role, to our congregation and, particularly, to the members of our choir.

Frankly, this is a real gut punch. As I envisioned the final years of my ministry here in Canton, this was the *one* box I truly believed would remain checked; to my great delight, not to mention utter relief. Alas, this was not to be.

August 10 is Meg's last Sunday with us. The Choir will be hosting a bit of a shindig in her honor and in thanks following worship that day. I hope that many of you can attend so we can see Meg off in style, and with much love.

VIII.

Just as is the case with Meg, so it would seem that God has plans for our church *other* than those for which we had hoped. As I said, the road of Discipleship is *hard*. Not only that, it is a road which winds its way through serious, real-world consequences. While our ideal is to find a person, or persons, to assume the role of Choir Director, the first priority is to procure a Pianist. I see this shaking out in one of three possible ways.

First, though we may not wish to imagine it, we have to be realistic in recognizing there may come a day when churches like ours, those which are located in rural areas and small towns, simply find themselves without musical accompaniment for worship. Second, we get young Alina and Beatrice on the fast track with respect to their on-going piano lessons. Or, third, we hope for the same kind of miracle which has repeatedly occurred over the years with respect to these positions giving us the likes of Dan Gordon, Michael Koon and Kathleen Allen, Tiffany Soricelli, Krista Easton, Kyle Forehand (Y'all), Laura Toland, Jarrett Larson, and Meg Dissinger; not to mention long-time organist Marylou Scott.



Dan Gordon



Michael Koons



Kathleen Allen



Tiffany Soricelli



Krista Easton



Kyle Forehand



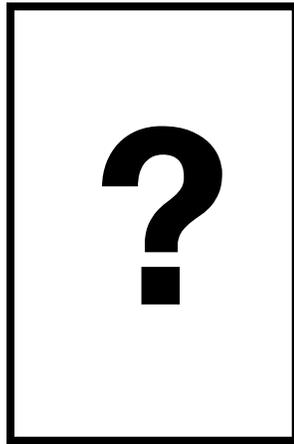
Laura Toland



Jarrett Larson



Meg Dissinger



TBA



**Mary Lou
Scott**



**Pastor
Donna Doig**

IX.

This, then, is the new narrative which is now upon our church. While we will soon be advertising the position, *your* role will be to pray, mightily, that we might make our way through this wilderness. When I say “your” role, I mean *all* of you: those sitting here today, those watching, and those reading this sermon. We are all sharing this foxhole together. The only other thing we can do is keep our hand to the plow. Come what may and above all else we, as a church, simply need to keep *going*.

This feels like a very good place to call for the “Amen.” Initially, for an ending, I had thought about drawing the comparison to just about everyone in this congregation who has their hand to the plow of their faith as it regards some particular area of their life be it work, health, school, raising kids, navigating what it means to be a kid or teenager, endeavoring in one’s marriage and building a life, caring for parents, winding down one’s days, or practicing your piano lessons. Though I am going to end on a different note, please know how inspiring it is to witness all of you working your respective plow.

X.

One of the things about such toil is that we lose a sense of time’s passing and just how much fruit our labors have borne. Thursday night, Linda and I had Pastor Donna over to dinner at the manse. I lament that many who are newer to the church have not had the opportunity to know her and to benefit from her abundant grace and wisdom. At several crucial moments in the past 27 years Donna was *the* person who helped me keep *my* hand to the plow of this church.

As we supped on ramp pesto chicken meatballs, sweet potato orzo with asparagus, fresh fruit, and a dessert of frozen strawberry pie, we shared our stories of how we came to Canton. Donna told us of how she and her husband, Don, arrived here owing to his work, the raising of their two kids, and her career as an elementary school educator/administrator. Linda and I told Donna about how we met, and also the many obstacles we, and the Search Committee, had to overcome so as to have me receive a call to this church. We also talked a lot about this congregation. How it has changed, the wonderful new people and, especially, the many kids who call this home.

XI.

All throughout our two hour conversation my homiletical wheels were turning (as they always do) and I realized one of the most important goals of any sermon, but especially those befitting a summer Sunday, is to encourage the listener to reflect upon one's life and labors in appreciation of just how much plowing our hands accomplish over the span of time and the seasons of our lives. Though in the moment it may not seem that way, every little bit helps and slow and steady wins the race. Even and, perhaps, especially when disruptions, distractions, and misdirections are visited upon us; not to mention the occasional curveball.

Yes, as people of faith we must always endeavor to simply keep going. Every once in awhile, though, we need to pause and look around at just how much our faith is accomplishing in the world and in our lives lest we lose our way and forget our purpose. Amen.