

Follow Where Jesus Leads

Do you ever watch game-shows? When I was at Martin Luther College, I worked on a Paint Crew. On our break, we used to watch “TPIR”—*The Price Is Right*. And one of the best parts was when Bob Barker would call the contestants down. It was great to see the shock and then the joy in their faces as their names were called. It’s that sort of joy we picture this morning—and even more. In the words we read this morning: *1Kings 19:19 So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him.* ”

So, picture it. There is Elijah. He is walking across a large field. He finds Elisha plowing behind two oxen. Elijah hurries up to him. He takes off his own cloak and puts it on Elisha. And then, Elijah keeps walking. Elisha faces a very strange situation. He is plowing. And that requires his full attention. But the prophet of the LORD has put his cloak on him. That means that Elijah is passing the torch to Elisha. In Elijah’s eyes, Elisha was now the next Prophet of the LORD. Elisha hesitates for split second. And then he lets the oxen go. He runs after Elijah.

These words paint a beautiful picture for us. But they don’t just make us feel good. They teach us and give us hope. They teach us to follow where Jesus leads. And for Elisha that meant that the LORD was leading him into the public ministry. The LORD had chosen him to speak God’s word to the people on the LORD’s behalf.

And, as we look closer at these words, there are some important details we apply to our lives. The first is that the LORD is the one who chooses men to be his pastors. It is important to note that the LORD didn’t tell Elijah: “Go talk to Elisha. Elisha has been begging me to be a prophet for some time now. I think it’s a good idea.” No, that is not how the LORD works. *He* chooses men to be pastors, prophets, evangelists to serve on his behalf, not the other way around.

The LORD chooses men to be his prophets, preachers, pastors on his behalf. But he doesn’t force them. In verse 21, we read: *20 Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. “Let me kiss my father and mother good-by,” he said, “and then I will come with you.” “Go back,” Elijah replied. “What have I done to you?” 1Kings 19:21 So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his attendant.* ”

Elisha ran after Elijah. And did he tell him: “I don’t really want to be a prophet for the LORD. But, OK, if you really *want* me to I can. Stay here while I break the news to my parents.” No, we don’t find a hint of hesitation or sadness. He said goodbye to his parents, had a party to celebrate and then served Elijah. The LORD chose Elisha to be his prophet. And, indeed, Elisha could have stayed there. Elisha wasn’t hurting financially. He had twelve yoke of oxen. He was a rich man. He didn’t follow Elijah because he had to. He followed him because he *wanted* to.

This is important for us to understand. Because the same thing happens today. Your pastors do not serve you with God’s word because they *have* to or because this is the only job they could hold down. Why are we so willing to give up things that other people might not? I remember one, long Spring day at the Seminary. We were in Professor Leyrer’s class. And we were complaining. We were complaining about the long hours we would be working as pastors. We were complaining that the salary we would get wouldn’t be able to pay off our loans for decades after we graduated. We were complaining about a number of things. And I remember our professor’s response. He said: “Men, think about this: in a very short amount of time you are going to be paid to learn and share God’s word.” That was all he said. That was all he needed to say. When the mom in the pew has to carve out ten, twenty minutes at the beginning or end of the day to read and study God’s word, I have the privilege of sitting down in a warm office and reading God’s word—and I get paid to do that. You can well imagine. That we stopped complaining pretty quick.

The LORD chooses men to serve him in the public ministry. But he doesn’t force them. And yet, as much joy as we have there are also challenges and frustrations. If you’re in a different line of work, you can look at the project you got done and have satisfaction at what you have done. For pastors it’s different. Jesus is the one who brings more people into a church. That leads every faithful pastor into temptation. On the one hand, it can lead

him to work so hard and sacrifice his time, energy and his family for outreach. Or, on the other hand, it can lead him to do nothing. And either path does not bring more people into church. Only Jesus can do that. There are so many things that are unseen, unknown, and unpredictable for pastors. And there is where Satan attacks them.

And so, my brothers and sisters, God has placed you in a wonderful situation. Just as your pastors share God's word with you, you can share his word with them. You can preach law to them and let them know that over-working won't add anything to Christ's kingdom, nor will doing nothing. You can preach to them of a Savior who has taken away their sins and gives them the joy of serving him.

Jesus teaches us to follow where he leads. For some, that will be in the public ministry. God has called some men to be prophets, preachers and pastors on behalf of his people. But God has called *all* of us into a private ministry. While God's word rejoices at having men chosen to share his word on behalf of his people, the bible *never* says that these men are better or less sinful than the rest of humanity. They are just as sinful. They are just as in need of a Savior. And they are just as forgiven as the rest of humanity.

I stress this point because it's so tempting for us to yearn for what God does not give to us. It is so easy for us to yearn to be Elijah or Elisha, working miracles, speaking directly to God. It might even be tempting to think how wonderful it might be to be a pastor, preaching in the pulpit. And who knows, there might be some of you young men or older men whom the LORD chooses to serve him as a pastor. But, if we obsess about this one area of service, then we overlook the ways Jesus has lead us into in our own lives.

We might yearn for what is not ours. Or even worse we might pray that God would take away what we have. I might be a pastor and yearn to be an engineer. You might be a mom or electrician and yearn to be something else entirely. And it may not be a sin to think about such things. For someday you might be one of those things. But when you have no gifts in that area and still yearn for it, what other word for that is there but coveting?

What does Jesus do with our yearnings? First, he shows us our sin. He shows us the ways and times we want what is not ours to yearn for. Then, what does he do? He reminds us what his life was like. He reminds us how many times in his life he didn't do what *he* wanted to do. No, instead, he did what his father did. And he rejoiced at doing what his Father wanted. Through these simple words in scripture he reminds us that he did what we could never do. He obeyed his Father. And he *wanted* to obey his Father. And through this and his sacrifice on the cross he takes away our sin.

And right there, that's where our minds are tempted to fall asleep. But, don't let them. For there is so much more in store for you. Not only does he take away our sin. But he gives to us the joy of serving him with our lives. So the Christian mom can clean the diapers with joy in her heart because she knows that this is a way she can thank her Savior for what he has done for her. The Christian dad can take out the trash with joy in his heart because he knows that God sees this little task and rejoices that he is doing it.

And if this is true for little tasks, how much more is it true of greater tasks! Getting up early on a Sunday morning, getting everything together and getting to church at 9 AM is no easy task—especially if there are children involved. Our Savior sees those struggles too. He sees how difficult it is to follow where he is leading you. And he rejoices that you are struggling to follow him.

And so, my brothers and sisters, follow where Jesus leads you. Pray for those whom God has called to serve you with God's word on your behalf: You pastors and leaders in your church. And in your own lives serve him faithfully and joyfully. Amen.