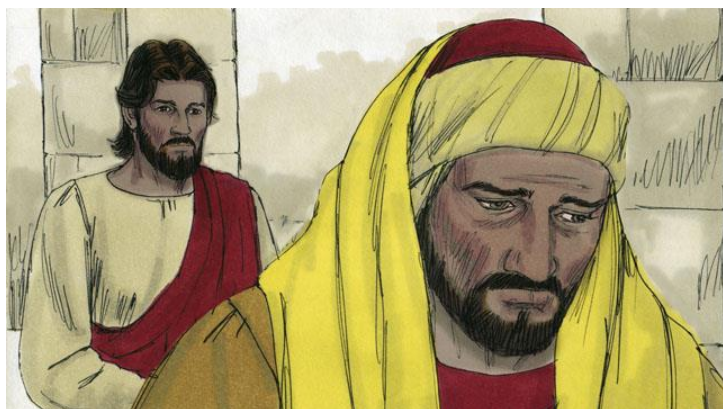


The Third Sunday after Pentecost  
June 26, 2022  
*"Freedom and Fruit"*



Are you ready to follow Jesus?

**St. John United Church of Christ**  
10207 Lincoln Trail, Fairview Heights, IL 397-6323  
Rev. Rosemary Captain

**\*RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

The way of our God is holy.

**Holy One, we seek your presence in our midst.**

The way of our God is wondrous.

**Wondrous God, we marvel at your works and  
marvelous deeds.**

The way of our God is awesome.

**Awesome God, we call out to you in hope.**

**\*INVOCATION:**

Liberating One, we keep you before us. Our souls rejoice and our hearts are gladdened. Our very beings find safety and security in your presence. We approach you with thanksgiving and anticipation. Enliven us to be your people in the world. Embolden us to live in freedom. Empower us to be your good news. Stand up in us and show us the path of life. Amen.

**\*UNISON PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION AND  
NEW LIFE:**

**Restoring God, too often we accept the conditions of the world around us and impose limitations on what is possible. We bind ourselves to societal conventions, norms, and pressure rather than follow you and your way. We conform to the values of this world rather than pursue the fruit of the Spirit. Show us the path of life and freedom in you. Teach us to plant seeds of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. May we perennially bear that fruit.**

### **WORDS OF GRACE:**

The Guiding Spirit opens us to new life and leads us to right paths. Hear the voice that continually calls, leads, and companions with us. Life in the Spirit is constantly renewed and restored. Let the grace of God nurture our roots and allow our flourishing.

### **\*GLORIA:**

**Glory to the Creator,  
and the Christ and the Spirit so near.  
As it was from the start so it shall be forever,  
One God always here.**  
(Repeat two more times.)  
(end) **One God always here. One God always here.**

### **OLD TESTAMENT READING: 2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14**

**2** Now the LORD was going to take Elijah up to heaven in a windstorm, and Elijah and Elisha were leaving Gilgal. <sup>2</sup> Elijah said to Elisha, “Stay here, because the LORD has sent me to Bethel.”

But Elisha said, “As the LORD lives and as you live, I won’t leave you.” So they went down to Bethel.

<sup>6</sup> Elijah said to Elisha, “Stay here, because the LORD has sent me to the Jordan.”

But Elisha said, “As the LORD lives and as you live, I won’t leave you.” So both of them went on

together. <sup>7</sup> Fifty members from the group of prophets also went along, but they stood at a distance. Both Elijah and Elisha stood beside the Jordan River. <sup>8</sup> Elijah then took his coat, rolled it up, and hit the water. Then the water was divided in two! Both of them crossed over on dry ground. <sup>9</sup> When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, “What do you want me to do for you before I’m taken away from you?” Elisha said, “Let me have twice your spirit.”

<sup>10</sup> Elijah said, “You’ve made a difficult request. If you can see me when I’m taken from you, then it will be yours. If you don’t see me, it won’t happen.”

<sup>11</sup> They were walking along, talking, when suddenly a fiery chariot and fiery horses appeared and separated the two of them. Then Elijah went to heaven in a windstorm.

<sup>12</sup> Elisha was watching, and he cried out, “Oh, my father, my father! Israel’s chariots and its riders!” When he could no longer see him, Elisha took hold of his clothes and ripped them in two.

### **Elisha succeeds Elijah**

<sup>13</sup> Then Elisha picked up the coat that had fallen from Elijah. He went back and stood beside the banks of the Jordan River. <sup>14</sup> He took the coat that had fallen from Elijah and hit the water. He said, “Where is the LORD, Elijah’s God?” And when he hit the water, it divided in two! Then Elisha crossed over.

**\*GOSPEL MESSAGE: Luke 9:51-62**

**Jesus sets out for Jerusalem**

<sup>51</sup> As the time approached when Jesus was to be taken up into heaven, he determined to go to Jerusalem. <sup>52</sup> He sent messengers on ahead of him. Along the way, they entered a Samaritan village to prepare for his arrival, <sup>53</sup> but the Samaritan villagers refused to welcome him because he was determined to go to Jerusalem. <sup>54</sup> When the disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to consume them?" <sup>55</sup> But Jesus turned and spoke sternly to them, <sup>56</sup> and they went on to another village.

**Following Jesus**

<sup>57</sup> As Jesus and his disciples traveled along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."  
<sup>58</sup> Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and the birds in the sky have nests, but the Human One<sup>[a]</sup> has no place to lay his head."  
<sup>59</sup> Then Jesus said to someone else, "Follow me." He replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."  
<sup>60</sup> Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead. But you go and spread the news of God's kingdom."

<sup>61</sup> Someone else said to Jesus, "I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say good-bye to those in my house."

<sup>62</sup> Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand on the plow and looks back is fit for God's kingdom."

These are the ancient words revealed to us anew.

**Thanks be to God. Amen.**

**MESSAGE: "Who is ready to follow Jesus?"**

There are hundred of books on sale with instructions on how to evangelize; how to convert people; how to approach people; how to treat newcomers in your church; how to hold on to the people who visit your church; how to nurture anyone who comes to your church and mold them into loyal, hard-working members of your church.

As we heard in today's Gospel lesson, Jesus had his own method. After all Jesus was in a hurry. He didn't have time to nurture anyone who might want to join him. He was on his way to Jerusalem. He was on his way to complete his mission that God had given to him. He was on his way to the cross.

In this Bible passage we have the words of Jesus to three would-be followers. To the first man, his advice was, "Before you follow me count the cost." No one can ever claim to have been induced to follow Jesus under false pretenses. Jesus has paid us

the compliment of pitching his demands so high that they cannot be higher. It may well be that we have done great harm to the Church by letting people think that church membership need not make so very much difference. We ought to tell them that it should make all the difference in the world. We might have fewer people but those we have would be really pledged to Christ.

*As an aside, there is a book that I recommend we all read, "The Cost of Discipleship" by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He lived from 1906 to 1945. He was a German Lutheran pastor, theologian, and anti-Nazi dissident. At the age of twenty-four, Bonhoeffer went to the United States in 1930 for postgraduate study and a teaching fellowship at New York City's Union Theological Seminary (a UCC based seminary.). He studied under Reinhold Niebuhr, a graduate of Eden Theological Seminary. Bonhoeffer's writings on Christianity's role in the secular world have become widely influential, and his book [The Cost of Discipleship](#) is described as a modern classic. He was accused of joining a group plotting to kill Hitler; which was never proven to be correct. Yet the day before the war ended, he was hanged.*

As we return to our Gospel lesson, we hear Jesus' harsh words to a second man who wished to follow him. In all probability the man's father was not dead. His saying most likely meant, "I will follow you after my father has died."

The point Jesus was making is that in everything there is a crucial moment; if that moment is missed the thing most likely will never be done at all. The man in this story had stirrings in his heart to get out of his spiritually dead surroundings; if he missed that moment he would never get out.

Jesus' words to the third man state a truth which no one can deny. No farmer ever ploughed a straight furrow looking back over his shoulder. There are some whose hearts are in the past. They walk forever looking backwards and thinking wistfully of the good old days. *(Have you ever heard these words? "I remember when our Sunday School rooms were full." "Why can't we go back to the 50's when everyone went to church somewhere?")*

Our Christian communities, no matter how small or large, go forward, not to the sunset, but to the dawn. The watchword of the kingdom is not "backwards!" but "Forwards!" To this man Jesus did not say either "Follow!" or "Return!" He said, "I accept no lukewarm service," and Jesus left the man to make his own decision.

Do each of us fit someplace in this story? Where does Jesus “fit” into your life? Are you committed or just “lukewarm?” Jesus says, “make your own decision.” Will you choose to be free of Jesus or fruitful for God. Amen.

**PASTORAL PRAYER:**

As we come to a time of prayer, we leave behind our trivial pursuits, O God. We are free to pour out our hearts to you; to confess on what we have done and what we have left undone. We look for excuses instead of looking to you for guidance. What we claim to be may not be what we truly are. Help us find the truth within us.

Our hearts are glad, living God, when you call us to your side and asks us to love our neighbors as you do. We can never achieve all you challenge us to do, but we continue this endeavor.

O God, Ruler of all, grant that the state of the world may be such that everywhere doors may be open to the truth of your word so that the saving power of your Gospel may spread unhindered everywhere. Everyone wants peace in the world, but we are not willing to give up what we have to make that happen.

Remember in your mercy the poor and the needy, the friendless and those without work, the widow

and widower, the fatherless and all who mourn. Remember the sick and the dying and especially all such dear to us. Satisfy their needs, lighten their sorrow, heal their sicknesses, and lift them up, that being comforted and restored they may be thankful.

To you the Parent eternal and our heavenly brother Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit be glory, thanksgiving and endless praise as we pray together .

..

**THE LORD’S PRAYER: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.**

**PRAYER RESPONSE: Three-fold Amen.**

**Amen, Amen, Amen.**

**INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:**

Jesus invites us to follow him in all ways, including the use and sharing of our resources. An accounting of our time, talent, and treasure that reflects our active citizenship in the kingdom brings glory to the Holy One. These seeds bear fruit.

**\*DOXOLOGY:**

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;  
Praise God, all creatures here below;  
Praise God for all that love has done.  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

**\*UNISON PRAYER OF DEDICATION AND  
THANKSGIVING:**

Giver of Gifts, receive the resources we bring. May they bless our community and our world. May bonds of scarcity be broken as we meet the needs around us with the gifts that you have first given to us. May we be gladdened by giving and rejoice in generosity. Amen.

**\*BENEDICTION:**

As you go in the world, stand firm in the freedom of Christ. Be guided and live by the Spirit. Glorify God and bear fruit. Amen.

**POSTLUDE: "March in D" G.F. Handel**

**PRAYER LIST:** Urban Baum, Donna Isselhard, David Seneczyn, Warren Neff, Carol White, Dennis Franklin, Cheri Schutzenhofer, Dorothy Wagner, Theo Mally, Leah Horner, Dan Gouge, Jane Riess, Judy Hartmann