

In today's Gospel, we will see Jesus making it very clear to those who ask Him, what the cost of being His disciple will be. To one man who says he will follow Him wherever he goes, Jesus tells him, "But the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head." To another who says he wants to bury his father first, Jesus says, "Let the dead bury their dead. But you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God" And to a third person, who says he wants to first say farewell to his family at home, Jesus says: "No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind, is fit for the Kingdom of God."

Sounds kind of harsh! Doesn't it? But it also seems pretty clear from these exchanges with those who want to follow Jesus, that following Him will involve some really difficult choices, and these choices will have some real consequences for each of us, and all others who truly want to follow Him. Jesus reminds us today that following Him will require that we need to avoid slipping back into our old lives and our old habits --- and to avoid depending on our old priorities and our old attitudes. And it's not because these things are necessarily bad or not worthwhile or helpful to us. It's just that, when we say "yes" to the Lord, and when we want to live the new life that He is offering us, we're also asking to never let anything else get in the way or take the place of our commitment to follow where He's leading us. And if we're stuck in our old life and old ways, we'll find it difficult to experience the new life that God intends for us. So if we only have a half-hearted commitment to the Lord, it will often result in a us wandering off the path to following him.

Discipleship is a journey, and it requires committing to the Lord in a radical way, by putting him first before all else, which will set us on a path to a life of true meaning, adventure, and purpose. And it's funny how our failure to open ourselves up to new experiences can hold us back. If you really think about it, God doesn't want us to remain the same. He doesn't want our lives and our relationship with him to grow stale. And it's not that He wants us to forget our pasts or not recognize the people and events who helped to shape our lives and make us who we are today. No, our blessings from the past should be cherished, and also our mistakes should be learned from. Our old selves, and our old memories and attitudes, while they're probably always going to be seen in our rear view mirrors, they should never be what we hang onto as our anchors. Only God can fill that role. Only He is worth hanging on to, in every situation.

Following someone else is not easy. We tend to want to do it our own way. The first reading today from the Book of Kings illustrates why that is. This reading talks about the call of Elisha, who is to be the successor of Elijah. The Lord instructed Elijah about the future kings of Israel and Syria, and He also told Elijah that Elisha would be his successor. But Elisha comes from a very wealthy family, who own twelve yokes of oxen. And at first, he doesn't seem ready to leave everything behind. And Elijah really doesn't encourage him to follow him, by asking him to now renounce all that he has. But in the end, Elisha chooses to perform a sacrifice and he slaughters the oxen and cooks their flesh with the wood of the plow, which is a clear sign that he is leaving his old life behind, and beginning a new one. We need to realize that following the Lord means, at times, that we will feel rejected, but we need to keep on our journey and keep letting the Lord into our lives and allowing Him to form us.

So what does it mean to follow Jesus? As we learn about the life of Christ in the New Testament, we find that we must remain with the Lord, because the Lord always remains with us. We are called to follow Him, and listen to Him and to allow His teaching and his words to form the way we think, and the way we act. So truly following the Lord means allowing Him to change every aspect of our lives, so we can more clearly be like Him, and accept His way of thinking.

So the message of the readings today, is that it will not be easy to follow the Lord. It's also really important to realize this up front, before we start experiencing difficulties. The Lord has already told us in advance that it won't be easy, so it's just a matter of staying on course, staying on the path He has chosen for us, and knowing that He will be with us and will help us along the way.