

I am just going to cut to the chase and acknowledge the one part of this passage that a lot of people really take issue with.

There is one line that kinda makes Jesus sound like a big jerk.

Jesus has just told his followers that he has nowhere to lay his head, specifically because the Samaritans would not host him and his followers as they traveled through Samaria.

And so after he says this, he tells one person among the group simply to, "Follow me."

This person seems willing enough to do it, and he's most likely aware of the ramifications and the level of commitment, because he says, *"I will go with you, but first let me bury my father."*

Now, here's when Jesus responds in a nasty way.

After making this seemingly-reasonable plea to be allowed to bury his beloved family member, Jesus says, in no uncertain terms, "Nope."

He actually says, *"Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God"* (Luke 9:60).

Now, if you think that Jesus was referring to the dead literally burying someone who has passed away, then his response is ludicrous, because someone who is dead can't bury someone else who has died.

But others say that it's more metaphorical, leave behind those who are spiritually dead who refuse to take up the challenge.

Okay, so what challenge is this?

It's the challenge of discipleship.

The high cost of discipleship, the path that requires us to make sacrifices if we are to follow Jesus in deed and not just in word.

I once saw a bumper sticker that said, *"If you were on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?"*

Discipleship means living in ways we would not otherwise live.

If your life as a Christian and your life as a non-Christian, or non-practicing Christian are essentially the same, then there's probably more you could be doing to live into your Christian identity.

What was holding that man back from following Jesus was his need to look back, to focus on the past, on his nuclear family, and Jesus says, nuh uh.

You can't plow straight rows if you are looking behind you, you won't get to your destination if you're always looking the rearview mirror.

So that man's vice was that he was focused on the past, and who he used to be and the relationships he used to have.

We all know those people, that no matter, how hard we try, they're never going to change.

Maybe Jesus knew that this man's father was one of those folks, perhaps he was spiritually dead and Jesus was telling the man not to waste his time, don't dwell on the past, on someone who won't change their spots.

Jesus' own famous disciples are guilty of this too, as we know that after he was crucified they went back to their normal jobs, like fishing and tax collecting.

It's like they reverted right back to who they were, they couldn't stay the new, courageous course.

So, in preparing for this sermon, I was reflecting on what holds me back from being able to accept the high cost of discipleship.

I don't think I dwell on the past, I don't wax poetic about the way things used to be, but what I need to give up is the need for control.

When I am not at my best discipleship self, I have a need for control.

You've known me long enough, this probably doesn't come as a surprise.

I am a planner, and a linear thinker, I like to make lists, check off boxes, set goals, accomplish goals, always moving ahead, becoming more "successful" as I go.

I like to think that I've got it all covered, my personal life, my professional life, my role as a community leader and a participant in the wider UCC.

I have got it all figured out, from everything to how I balance my time, to how this church is doing and where it's headed, it's under control.

Now I am showing my youthful naïveté, because those of you who have been around for a while are probably thinking to yourselves, well that's funny, one day she will learn that control is just an illusion.

There's no such thing.

And it's true, I know that, when I am at my best self.

When I am living into the full identity of discipleship, I remember that it is God or the universe or randomness that's in control, but it's certainly not me.

When I am being a faithful Christ-follower the big difference for me is that I am able to relinquish that need for control.

I stop making an idol out of my own opinions and desires, I stop making decisions which are driven by my ego and I start making decisions that I believe I am called to make by someone or something greater than myself.

Jesus' call to discipleship is an invitation to ask ourselves, "How are our lives different as followers of Jesus than what they might have been otherwise?"

My life is different in that I am able to place my trust and my faith in God, rather than solely relying on my own competence.

Now, we aren't perfectly faithful 100% of the time, we mess up and have times when we backslide.

But it's my hope, that at the end of the day, I will have spent more time living into my Christian identity than shirking it.

I hope there's more than enough evidence to convict me of being a Christian.

Now, most of the time, I know that I am not in control, but I still like to think that things are generally under control around the world.

Well, if there ever was a week to remind me that things are out of control in this world, it's this past week.

Not only do we have the continuing epidemics of gun violence, but Britain just voted to leave the European Union and a certain xenophobic demagogue continues to blaze a trail to the White House.

I know Christianity has been around for a long time and we are nothing new, but I feel a real sense of urgency to live into our values and ethics now more than ever.

There are always reasons to postpone following Jesus, you may have to devote time to a loved one or you really like brunch and mimosas on Sunday morning or, The Cape.

But listen, there are urgent matters that need our attention. Now.

Not when we are good and ready.

LGBTQ folks and people of color and working-class people who can't keep their heads above water and undocumented immigrants and refugees, they all need to know that they're going to be okay.

They need to know that their cries are heard, that they are supported and cared for and wanted and all of us status quo Christians have not turned a blind eye.

Theologian Michael Rogness says that,

“The umbrella truth above this whole topic of discipleship is that being a Christian and a disciple of Jesus gives us a whole new identity.

We are no longer simply a biological unit on this earth, but a child of the God of the whole universe.

We now live knowing that “our citizenship is in heaven”
(“Commentary on Luke 9: 51-62,” WorkingPreacher.org, June 30, 2013).

The Earth doesn't have time for us to be good and ready to claim that new identity.

It needs us now, to recognize that we are Children of God, who answer first to God, who are inextricably bound up with every other person on earth.

And while we live in the most technologically advanced era in human history, it seems like more and more people are suffering everyday and we have to do something about it.

I remember when I was a kid, I decided to put my mom to the test, which, fair warning, it's never a good idea to put your parent to the test, but I was a foolish child.

So I asked my mom, "Who do you love more, me or God?"

She thought about it for about less than one second and said, "God."

I was aghast.

How could this be possible?!

My mother wasn't supposed to love anyone more than she loved her kids.

So, after I stopped pouting, she explained to me that her love of God, first and foremost, is what gave her the strength and wisdom to be a devoted and loving parent.

She said she couldn't make an idol out of the role of parenthood, but her job was to raise us up to be loving, caring people, who also love God more than anything else.

And I think that's exactly what Jesus asks us to do in this passage, to put him above even family.

I find myself thinking about the man who wants to bury his dad and Jesus thinking, 'he's a lost cause, don't worry about him, there are other lives to save.'

But if we become too fixated on our familial relationships and ties, we might find ourselves looking backwards, and veering off track because we aren't looking where we're going.

I don't think Jesus would have made a statement about family relationships if they didn't get in the way of people following him.

Sometimes we place too much stock in our identities, whether it's as a parent, or an American, or the identity we find through our jobs.

My mother was wise enough to admit that she loved God and was Christian before anything else.

Some of us need to give up our need for those other, self-serving identities.

Others of us need to give up behaviors, for example, James and John needed to give up their need for vengeance in order to follow Jesus.

When the Samaritans wouldn't let him stay with them, these two brothers come to Jesus' defense, right out of a scene from Rambo and say, "*Jesus, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?*" (Luke 9:55).

That's a pretty harsh proposal, as Jesus wisely says, um no, and he actually turns and rebukes James and John for suggesting such a thing.

I need to give up my need for control, others need to give up their need for specific identities, James and John needed to give up their need for vengeance.

We all have the tendency to set our sights on other things, which prevent us from following Jesus.

And it's tempting to say, oh, I'll get there, let me just make sure my ducks are all in a (neat, tightly-controlled) row, or that my family's cared for, or that I've commanded fire to come down on my enemies first.

But to all of our excuses and reasons for procrastination, Jesus says, "NO. NOW."

Not later. Now.

The hurting, broken people of the world need us this instant.

So what do you need to give up, that will cause you to live in a way you might not otherwise live, which will allow you to follow Jesus to the best of your abilities?

Amen.