

Commitment

“When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.” Luke 9:51

With sports, it can be described as giving 110%. With work, it can be described by years of service given. With school, it can be described by the grades received. With the military, it can be described by the willingness to put one’s life in harm’s way. With families, it can be described by the hours devoted to traveling to, attending, cheering, consoling and traveling back from children’s events. Now there maybe a few different words these examples might lead you to, but there’s one word in particular that I’ll have you hold onto for our time together and that is the word, commitment.

Athletes show their commitment by pushing themselves to give maximum effort and then when it appears that they have nothing left to try and give a little more. Businesses often seek people in the workforce who prove their commitment with steady, loyal and quality work. Schools encourage and reward students to commit to studying and hard work by linking good grades to a successful future. Men and women of our armed forces find no greater commitment than from those fellow soldiers struck down in the line of duty. Parents are committed to making sure their children have every opportunity possible to succeed regardless of the time it takes.

We can spot commitment in a variety of places. When we’re looking for it, I don’t think it’s very hard for us to find numerous examples of what we think commitment looks like. But now take a moment and consider, what does commitment look like to you when it comes to faith? What does committed faith look like in your mind? Do you measure a committed faith through finances, someone who gives significantly, who tithes, giving ten percent of their income? In your book, is committed faith that person who attends every service and also volunteers regularly, someone who lives like church is their second home? Or is committed faith, that individual who can share his faith with ease, who teaches a Bible class, quotes the Bible from memory and daily studies the catechism?

Now to be clear, all of these things that I just mentioned are good things, truly great things, that every church desires to see happening in the lives of its members. However, these examples aren’t really the best examples of committed faith. I know that this might sound odd to us, but when it comes to faith, the standard for committed faith is unlike any other form of commitment we witness in this life. Committed faith really isn’t something that has human measurements but rather it has divine measurements. In other words, our examples of committed faith aren’t the main criteria. It is God who sets the standard for committed faith and His standard is perfection, 24/7, 365 days a year for every year of life we are given.

The second half of our Gospel reading from Luke 9 gives us this sense of the divine standard for what truly is committed faith. In verses 57-62, Jesus encounters three potential disciples and with each individual we hear that the cost of committed faith is higher than what sinful human beings are able to pay. Jesus pushes back on the first person’s claim to follow Him wherever He goes because this person can’t possibly understand what he’s promising. Jesus had no home on earth. He was heading toward the cross. He was heading towards rejection. Even Peter, a well-known disciple, would attempt a version of this would-be disciple’s promise much later, on the night Jesus was betrayed, and even he couldn’t follow through as Jesus’ cross drew near.

With the second individual, this time Jesus actually calls the person to follow Him. While this person seems willing, he is also hesitant because he needs to bury his father. Yet Jesus’ response, that likely seems uncaring to us, highlights the priority of God’s kingdom over everything even a proper burial of a loved one! Finally, with the third individual, Jesus challenges the conditional commitment He hears from the would-be disciple, indicating that a committed follower’s full attention needs to be on the task at hand and not distracted by anything else.

From Jesus' words, we see that committed faith in God's eyes has no excuses, no distractions, no values or priorities higher than the kingdom of God. Committed faith goes all the way and doesn't pick or choose the moments to really follow. Committed faith doesn't live by conditions that limit, even temporarily, the ability to follow. Committed faith isn't distracted from the task of following. Based on Jesus' own words, the reality is that committed faith isn't something that sinful human beings are able to accomplish at all.

So, the end result of Jesus' words here in our Gospel reading isn't simply to challenge us and lead us to say I must be this committed to the Lord. We can't! Committed faith isn't simply trying to prove to God that we belong on His team day in and day out. Committed faith isn't simply trying to prove to ourselves and to those around us that we deserve to be on God's team either. Honest, sincere, real, committed faith can never rest on our own sinful actions. Instead, honest, sincere, real, committed faith must rest on Jesus and His sinless actions.

This is why the first verse of our Gospel reading this morning is so important. Listen again to Luke 9:51, **“When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he [Jesus] set his face to go to Jerusalem.”** With this one verse, Luke describes to us the total commitment of our Savior. Jesus was determined to face what was coming in Jerusalem even when it meant the rejection of some along the way! Jesus was resolved to carry out God the Father's plan of salvation even though it would cost Jesus everything! Jesus was committed to the grueling life of perfection, the gruesome death of the cross and the grave weight of the world's sins upon His shoulders. There would be no excuse, no distraction, no value or priority that would deter Him from ushering in God's kingdom through His death and resurrection. Jesus was committed and He followed through. He is the only example of honest, sincere and real commitment to God.

Thanks be to Jesus, clinging to His perfect and total commitment, we truly can say that we have committed faith. For faith that rests solely on Jesus' commitment alone truly is proved worthy and valuable to be a part of God's team, to be a part of His family. And faith that seeks to be continually committed to the Lord, doesn't look toward its own actions for affirmation and assurance, but rather receives the results of the Lord's promised commitment to us delivered to us through Word and Sacrament. Your committed faith isn't measured by your weak and sinful actions, but by Jesus' powerful, perfect and merciful actions on your behalf.

And when we view committed faith through the lens of Jesus' death and resurrection, through the forgiveness, life and salvation that He has won and delivers to us, we are freed from the have-to's that are required to prove every other commitment in this world. Because our committed faith is proved solely in Jesus' perfect commitment, we get to live, love and serve freely for Jesus' sake in this world. We are no longer trying to prove we belong to God. Rather because we already belong to God through Jesus' total commitment, we live as those who belong. Our faith isn't occupied with the fear of measuring up, but rather abounds with the fruit of the Spirit, with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

And as these fruits of the Spirit, by God's grace, take root and grow in our lives, their existence reminds us of God's commitment to us not our commitment to Him. For it is our God who promises to bring our faith to completion. It is our God who gives the things that our faith needs to grow and produce. It is our God who follows through on His commitment proving to us and through us that He truly loves this world and desires that all people join in Him heaven when He returns. May our God's commitment to us through Jesus Christ always create, sustain and motivate committed faith in us. Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Dan