

**Let the Dead Bury Their Dead**

~ Matthew 8:18-22

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I love celebrating our graduates! I think graduation is such a fun and exciting time. All of the fun grad activities, plus the adventure of moving into something new. Graduation acts as a sort of milestone or marker of experiences, marking experiences before graduating and after. It's also scary for some because they realize that things get a bit harder after graduating. Grade nine grads head into High school, high school students head off to university, college or the work force, and university/college grads begin their careers full time. And there's no turning back. In fact graduations help prepare us to learn that we have to keep moving forward even when it gets harder.

This past week I was reflecting with Andrea about my kickboxing days. Most of you don't know that I used to be a kickboxer. I took lessons, spared, all that. I don't talk about it often, but I was pretty intimidating. It was a mixed martial arts/kickboxing class. The instructor was new to teaching, but not new to martial arts, and when I would spar with others in the class, they would literally run from me when I flinched at them. It was actually pretty hard to find someone in the class who would stand their grounds. This is a true story! I can't remember if I was in grade eleven or twelve when I started. I really wanted to get into kickboxing I really enjoyed it so I went with my buddy to this class he was part of. There are a few more details of the story that I usually like to leave out. Like the fact I only went to two classes. The others in the class were kids that were half my height and they ran from me just because of my size even though they could have probably taken me out; then there was my friend who was way bigger and taller than me and very good. I stopped going after two classes because on the second class, during the sparring, the instructor realized that I wasn't going to get any sparing done with these kids, so he spared with me.

I remember it pretty clearly. There was one point where he unleashed a flurry of kicks and punches at me, and I remember just blocking one after another – five or six hits. He even took a step back in surprise and he and my buddy said “woah”. Then he switched his feet around, and my buddy said “Oh you just changed your stance to blablahblah.” The instructor smiled at him then turned and kicked me square in the face. I had left my guard down after the blocks, and he just kicked me. He didn't mean to make contact- he was just as surprised as I was I think. But after that I thought “wow, I don't like getting kicked in the face.” And so I never went back. So that ended my intimidating kickboxing days.

I thought I wanted to be a kickboxer. I knew that I was going to have to take some hits. That it would take practice and dedication. I signed up because I was ready for that. To be a good

kickboxer, this is what you sign up for. - Yes it's extreme. But as soon as I didn't like it I was out. Not for me!

Unfortunately, some people live their Christian walk this same way. They say they want to follow after Jesus, but then they bail when it's hard to they don't like something that Jesus taught that doesn't line up with their worldview. They read something in the Bible and they say well I don't believe that. I think it's different. – Well we can't disagree with God's word because –it's God's word! It's truth. Which means that disagreeing with it is like closing our eyes, plugging our ears, singing "Lalalalalala!". It would be like jumping out of a plane without a parachute because you decide you don't believe in gravity. It doesn't change the truth just because you decide you don't like it. Yet all too often this is what can happen. We twist things to fit our worldviews.

Think about how we view Jesus- let's think for a moment who is Jesus? He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, he is the good shepherd, the Lion of Judah, the rock, the true light, the only begotten son of the father, he is the word of God become flesh, the bread of life, our creator and deliverer, our everlasting father, HE IS GOD. Jesus is the judge of the living and the dead, the King of kings and Lord of lords, he is majestic and mighty, no one compares to him. He is the way, the truth and the life, the image of the invisible God, our redeemer, the power of God, the high priest, the perfect sacrifice, the almighty one, our comforter, the omnipotent prince of life and prince of peace.

...yet we have reduced him to a poor puny savior who is just begging us to accept him into our hearts.

Jesus doesn't need our acceptance. Jesus doesn't need you or me at all. WE NEED HIM! We need him for everything. Every decision, every action. Our very existence depends on him holding everything together. In our sin we are lost and lawbreakers, and targets of God's righteous judgment, but Jesus stood in the way and took our sin and God's judgement upon himself in our place. We minimize Jesus to fit with our puffed up view of ourselves. And as a result we only want to hear encouraging messages that tickle our ears and spur us on through the week, and many neglect to do the hard things that Jesus calls us to every day- loving our neighbors, sharing our faith, giving to those who are in need, giving our time, mentoring others, being mentored, stop watching pornography, being kind to our families, loving our spouse with the power, intensity and commitment that God loves us with regardless if they love you back. Yes these things are hard because we are justifying our actions because the teachings of Jesus don't fit with what we want to believe.

Graduates, ahead of you is a time where you will be tested. Jesus will call you to go harder and farther that you have ever gone before. He will ask you to do hard things. Many will turn away

because they are not willing to go the distance, sacrifice enough, or let go of their idols and worldviews. True disciples, true worshippers are called to go the distance and they do. They are willing, and they go.

The passage we are looking at is in Matthew chapter 8 you can go there now on your device or flip there in your bibles. But this is I think one of the hardest teachings of Jesus. There are many hard things He teaches, but this is right up there. However we learn some very valuable lessons about what it means to follow Jesus. Matthew 8 verses 18-22. Let's read it together.

### The Cost of Following Jesus

<sup>18</sup> Now when Jesus saw a crowd around him, he gave orders to go over to the other side. <sup>19</sup> And a scribe came up and said to him, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." <sup>20</sup> And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." <sup>21</sup> Another of the disciples said to him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." <sup>22</sup> And Jesus said to him, "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead."

There are two disciples here who want to follow Jesus. With the first, Jesus is trying to get away from the crowds, and one scribe comes to him and declares that he is ready to follow Jesus anywhere. This is wonderful is it not? Now we can't really judge this man's heart or intentions too much because we don't know much else other than Jesus' response. Jesus responds by what at first sounds like a weird way to answer someone ***"Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."*** The disciple was probably like ...okay... so when do we leave. What Jesus is saying here is that the road ahead is not a comfortable one. His road ahead is not cushy or comfortable. He has no place to sleep. He and his disciples are at the mercy of the hospitality of others. We also must remember that people who thought Jesus was the coming messiah thought that he was going to go overthrow the Romans and be their new king. If you devoted yourself to the new king, there would be a pretty great lifestyle at the end of the road. But Jesus wasn't looking at Jerusalem and the triumphal entry as the end of the road, he was looking ahead to the road up the hill of Golgotha to the cross. To follow Jesus would mean hardship, fear, mockery, and for many of the disciples – a martyr's death. To be a disciple and follower of Jesus you cannot expect it to fit with your comfy lifestyle. You can't live in the bubble of your comfort zone and expect Jesus to operate in those confines. Jesus wants to call you out of the boat and onto the water.

It is so interesting when you give your future to Jesus. Your plans and hopes and dreams –give them all to Him. I remember exactly where I was when I felt that God led me to decide to be a teacher. I had been asking God what I should do as a career, and seeking His wisdom. I was

dating Andrea at the time and thought well this is great! I can support a family on a teacher's wage. And then as I was finishing up my degree, that's when I felt God call me to full time ministry. I wasn't clinging to where I thought I was going, I didn't say no because I spent time and money preparing to be a teacher so that's what I'm going to do! I believe God put me on that road to prepare me for the ministry at that moment. As we go through life we get many big ideas dreams and ambitions. We need to be willing to lay them all at the foot of the cross at any time.

The second guy is a disciple who wants to take some time to bury his father. I think we would all agree that this is perfectly reasonable. The other disciples were probably like "oh my, I'm so sorry to hear that. And Jesus was like "Nope." He replies and says ***"Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead"***. It sounds so harsh. Now commentators tell us that there are a number of very possible scenarios of what was really happening with this guy's father. One scenario is that his father has just died and he must go take care of things at home. This is a son's responsibility and part of what it means to honor his father. Another perfectly possible situation is that his father was near death and it would be the son's responsibility to go and care for him until he passes away. This could have taken weeks or a year. But this was a feasible possibility. There's a third scenario that was a custom around that time where there would be a second burial, where they would go and gather the bones from the tomb and have a second burial, and that process could take up to a year. Some commentaries suggest that this might be what Jesus meant by the dead burying their dead, though more likely Jesus was referring to the spiritually dead. For Jesus to say don't go back and instead follow me some say that He would say such an audacious thing because he knew the window of opportunity to follow Jesus was small. These other possible scenarios in some way make it more acceptable for Jesus to say such an offensive thing. However commentator Craig Keener said "the offense lies not with the immediacy of the demand, but in the priority the demand takes over family obligations". It is hard for us to put family behind Jesus in terms of priority. Because when we choose Jesus over family, we hear about it. We get laughed at or guilt tripped. But when we make the mistake of choosing family over Jesus, we don't have a guilt trip. Jesus isn't standing there wagging his finger at us. But Jesus called this guy to get his priorities in order. We try to come up with a variety of solutions to try and make Jesus' demands more palatable, but at the end of the day it doesn't matter because this is a demand of priorities.

Imagine if your first encounter with Jesus was this. Or one of the other many hard things he asked people to do: Go sell everything and give to the poor, let the dead bury their dead; If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple; eat my flesh and drink my blood; We must not let our worldview – our desires - interpret the meaning of these passages for us. Imagine if Jesus called you and said bring your lethal injection needle and

follow me. Imagine if he called you and me to hate your father mother spouse and child, or if he said go and sell your stuff and give it away, and we come to the terrifying reality that Jesus has said these things. He has called us to lay down our lives and die to ourselves, he has called us to love him in a way that makes our closest relationships look like hate.

In the book multiply, Francis Chan says:

*"Sometimes our personal agendas or assumptions divert us from what God is saying in a biblical passage. For example in Luke 12:33, Jesus said 'Sell your possessions and give to the needy.' We will often read a verse like that and say 'Okay, obviously God is not asking me to literally sell my possessions and give to the needy. This passage must mean \_\_\_\_\_.' Really? Because it sure seems that Jesus is saying that these disciples should literally sell their possessions and give to the needy. In fact, looking at the context of Jesus' teaching and ministry only strengthens the literal meaning of that passage. Based on the rest of the book of Luke, this is exactly the sort of thing Jesus would call his followers \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ do."*

*The fact that Jesus called his disciples to sell some possessions at that moment in history does not necessarily mean that every Christian has to sell every possession at all times, but the point is that our own agendas can keep us from even considering such a thing. If Jesus called his disciples to sell some of their stuff and use that money to meet the needs of the poor, shouldn't we be open to His calling us to do the same thing today?"*

And I think that's it right there. We can't have anything in the way of our following Jesus. We must be willing to let go of anything and everything - including our very lives – because he is worth it. Anything we put as a priority over God is an idol. I would guess that these responses to these individuals cut right to the idols in their lives. One would probably want comfortable living, and the other loves his family more than anything else – including God. I would guess that because that's the way we see Jesus speak to people – that the way he talked to the woman at the well, the rich young ruler, Nicodemus, the Pharisees, when talking about sin. So this was likely in the same vein.

We must examine the idols in our lives and the worldviews and beliefs in our lives that get in the way if following Jesus. We must be willing to give up whatever He calls us to so that He can lead us closer to Himself or to use us for His good work. When he calls us to go and share our faith, we can't be like, "ack, it's kinda awkward, I'd rather not" Or when he calls us to worship with other believers regularly we can't say "ah, but it's so early, it's my only morning to sleep in" Can you even imagine what Jesus would have said to one of his followers if they said "Can we not go the next city and heal more people, all this walking- I'm tired and want a nap"

Brothers and sisters, we must come to grips with the extreme commitment we have made to follow Jesus and not let ourselves get in the way. We may hesitate, we may pray through it more, but ultimately we trust when we don't understand. Like parents, sometimes you tell your kids things, or give them boundaries that they don't understand, but they are for their benefit. And your child just has to trust you because you are worthy of their trust. We trust in Jesus with everything we have because he is worthy

It's hard to give up our idols, but with the power of God it is completely doable. When there's an idol in our lives we have to be radical in how we get rid of it. Jesus said if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it into the fire for it's better for part of you to go to hell than your whole body. There's a scene in the movie Fireproof – a Christian movie with Kirk Cameron – where he has been watching pornography on his computer, and his wife knows about it. And as God takes hold of his life and he realizes that this computer is in the way, he takes it outside and takes a baseball bat to it. The neighbour thinks he's totally lost it. Would you smash your phone if it was in the way of your calling to be a better parent, spouse, or friend? Would you quit your job if Jesus called you to the ministry? Would you stop playing video games so that you could spend more time in God's word? To what extreme would you be willing to go if Jesus called you to? Or perhaps a better way to say it is 'What extreme are you willing to go because he has called you?' Ask God to show you what your idols are and surrender them to the foot of the cross no matter what the cost.

Many will turn away because they are not willing to go the distance, sacrifice enough, or let go of their idols and worldviews. True disciples, true worshippers are called to go the distance and they do. They are willing, and they go.

We must follow in every way. Jesus will discover what we are holding on to and we will call us to lose it if it is in the way of following him. Grads consider the cost. Consider the cost of being fully devoted, and consider the greater cost of not following him. He will do great things through you.

If you are new here this morning, you don't follow Jesus, and this is your first time hearing the teachings of Jesus. Jesus said let the dead bury their dead. He was talking about you. Without Jesus we are dead. There is not spiritual life in us without him, and we cannot achieve eternal life without him. Without Christ we are dead in our sin, we cannot pay the price on our own. Jesus is life. I would encourage you to take these strong words of Jesus to heart. And it's my prayer that you would talk seriously with the person you came with about what it means to find abundant life in Jesus, and how you can get it.

Imagine if we all served Jesus without any idols in our lives? Oh the things God will accomplish through Sturgeon Valley Baptist Church as we continue to strive together to follow Jesus with all of our hearts, mind, soul, and strength, and put him in first above all else.

Let's pray.