

**Sermon- Proper 8 (C)**  
**Charles R. Cowherd**

2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14

Psalms 77:1-2, 11-20

Galatians 5:1,13-25

**Good Shepherd (Burke)**  
**June 30, 2019**

Luke 9:51-62

**OPENING:**

I love a good training montage in movies—you know where the hero of the story at some point has to go through a series of exercises that train him or her for the ultimate goal. You can recognize these montages because the theme song kicks in unsubtly, all while the heroes go through physical and mental training to toughen them up.

Think Daniel-son getting trained by Mr. Miyagi in the *Karate Kid* or “Rocky” punching huge slabs of meat in Soviet Russia to get ready to fight Ivan Drago.<sup>1</sup> So, as Jesus is getting the disciples ready, having set his face for Jerusalem, having left the confines of home in Galilee and is embarking on this journey to the climactic end on the Cross, imagine “You’re the Eye of the Tiger” playing or some other cheesy 1980’s rock ballad in the background.

Jesus knows that the journey will be full of trials and tribulations for himself and the disciples, and that their discipleship will thus require formation and discipline and skills that they might not possess.

These trainings and guidance are different from climbing up the steps of the Philadelphia Museum of Art or “sanding the floor”, or “waxing on and off” BUT they demand even tougher spiritual training.

The disciples are lucky, of course, to have such a good teacher, Jesus the skilled rabbi, the patient and brilliant instructor. But even then, the disciples fail every test.

**SAMARIA:**

The first station of training comes in Samaria: the embattled zone in between Galilee and Jerusalem historically inhospitable and downright hostile to Jews. The Samaritans play their part and turn away Jesus’ messengers. James and John, the ace students, think that they know the next move, that they are ready to

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/TrainingMontage?from=Main.GonnaFlyNowMontage>

perform the exercise.

They are going to call in “shock and awe” on the Samaritans, smote them with devastating justice.

Their playbook reads as such: because that’s what Elijah did, that’s what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah.

But Jesus chastens the “Sons of Thunder,” because they are being trained for a different sort of task, one that will require them to build up, rather than destroy, to forgive, rather than condemn, to love, rather than hurt.

### **DISCIPLESHIP:**

In fairness to the 12 named disciples, they had already passed a really hard test. They already went through Spring Training and the Preseason and made it to the team.

Remember their call stories? They are always remarkably succinct: Jesus says “Follow me” and they left their nets and followed him.

No gnashing of teeth or counting the cost at that time. No weighing the economic or familial or personal stakes like in the call stories that we heard today. They did not even know Jesus, but they agreed to follow him.

For that, the 12 get their names up in the lights, so to speak, and we remember them as Saints and Giants of the church.

The named disciples, also though, get remembered for moments like these, when they get rebuked and fall flat on their faces, when they don’t pass the test, when they deny Jesus and abandon their discipleship.

### **TEACHING:**

Jesus is a brilliant teacher because he knows the training regimen for all of us, how our journeys with Christ will be different than the person sitting next to us.

Jesus know when to pull and when to push, when to show mercy and when to say “buckle up.” In doing that, Jesus does not ask that we lose our identity or who we are as Children of God, but only that we follow him. In the words of one preacher “(Jesus) calls us not to slavish imitation but to follow—each of us in the context of his time and place.” And, thanks be to God, “There is no time or place or

circumstance where one cannot follow.”<sup>2</sup>

That sort of training can seem unfair. How come ‘so and so’ gets the prize whereas the one who has been following Jesus this whole time, who is begging to be there, gets another treatment?

Such is the illogic of God’s grace, the unfairness of discipleship.

## **TRYPTCH**

All this comes into great relief with the next training exercise in our Gospel reading. In a series of three encounters, Jesus explains the difficulties of following him, and in all three cases, all three training sessions, the prospective disciple fails.

All these students have an eagerness and a willingness to do God’s work so, you would think, would be his main allies and teammates in the journey to Jerusalem but instead Jesus answers by discouraging his effort. But Jesus, somewhat stridently, calls the nature of their discipleship into question. Jesus has no time for burying parents or even saying goodbye.

These three stories are offered up in “staccato fashion” almost as a way of shocking our senses.<sup>3</sup> Jesus is so tough on them that these training montages come to a bit of a sour end, with dissatisfied and rebuked disciples.

They are not pumped and primed for the journey to Jerusalem but rather cut down to size and humbled, if not having given up the whole thing all together.

## **DIVERSITY:**

It’s interesting that Luke is careful not to name those three would-be disciples. Instead, we are left wondering “where do I fit in?” Which one of those is me?” Luke leaves it up to us, instead, to how we would respond in this situation.<sup>4</sup> Everyone is asking “Could I leave my family?”  
Could I leave without saying goodbye?

---

<sup>2</sup> Ernest T. Campbell “Follow Me.” in Long, Thomas G., and Cornelius Plantinga, eds. 1994. *‘A Chorus of Witnesses’: Model Sermons for Today’s Preacher*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans. 168-9.

<sup>3</sup> Green, Joel B. 2014. *The Gospel of Luke*. (NICNT Commentary) Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. 402.

<sup>4</sup> Green, 401.

Would I give up all this (whatever this is) for Jesus' sake?

I shudder at my answer. Just as one example: As I was composing this sermon, all week I was working on another for the funeral held here yesterday, and not letting "the dead bury the dead"????

The good news is that we are not being called as automaton in a spreadsheet for the Lord's work but rather as a unique, beloved, flawed, individuals made in the *imago dei* with a specific purpose for God's collective plan.

## **CONCLUSION:**

A story to bring us home here:

After JFK's assassination, a pastor and congregation in Michigan wanted to reach out to Marina Oswald, the widow of Lee Harvey, because they heard she wanted to stay in the United States. After all the logistics were accomplished through the FBI, etc., they were able to move her to Ann Arbor, Michigan and got her set up with a family. Eventually word got out and the mail started pouring in. Some said it was unpatriotic, others that it was unwise. One woman said she had "belonged to a church for 40 years and what it had done for her in all that time she could write on the pack of a postage stamp." The Pastor answered every letter, and said that might be true: BUT "The one thing you haven't shown us is what we have done is unlike Christ."<sup>5</sup> That we have failed to answer when he said come and follow me.

Like most things that God is up to us, this passage gives us great freedom, because it's not one-size fits all. Put in another way: through Christ we now have the freedom to lose our possessions, the freedom to love outside our comfort zones.

The good news it imparts us with great responsibility because Jesus is calling all of us, where we will all be given an opportunity to make a testimony, to strike out on this journey, to walk in Jesus' footsteps and learn from him.

**AMEN**

---

<sup>5</sup> Ernest T. Campbell "Follow Me." Long, Thomas G., and Cornelius Plantinga. 1994. *'A Chorus of Witnesses': Model Sermons for Today's Preacher*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans. 169; <https://www.nytimes.com/1964/12/24/archives/oswalds-widow-to-study-english.html>; [https://aadl.org/sites/default/files/aa\\_news/aa\\_news\\_19641223-marina\\_oswald\\_to\\_study\\_english\\_at\\_um.jpg](https://aadl.org/sites/default/files/aa_news/aa_news_19641223-marina_oswald_to_study_english_at_um.jpg)