

Sermon for Pentecost 6 (Series C)

Text: Luke 9:51-62

Preached on 07-08-2007

Introduction:

During our vacation, Amber and I saw one of the great wonders of the world: The Grand Canyon. Imagine if you were adventurous enough and in shape enough to join a hiking expedition to the bottom of the Grand Canyon. You get everything together and pack your gear. Then, just as your group is about to begin its descent, the group leader says, "Here. I can't have anything weighing me down in the event of an emergency. You'll have to carry my gear in addition to your own." Standing there, at the top of this immense canyon, you know how ridiculous it would be to make such a journey carrying extra baggage.

Just a few months before His encounters with the unwelcoming Samaritans and some would-be followers, Jesus had said, **"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me"** (Luke 9: 23). Some hear these words and assume that Jesus was saying that His followers must be willing enough to carry extra burdens; strong enough to go through life with additional baggage. Further study of Scripture, however, reveals that this is not the case at all. Jesus actually tells us to...

Theme: Drop the Baggage you are Carrying!

Part I: The baggage of burning anger

Part II: the baggage of poor excuses

Part I: The baggage of burning anger

It goes without saying that Jesus had a destination of His own to reach. Driven by His relentless determination, we're told, **"Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem"** (v. 51). As the all-knowing Son of God, Jesus was fully aware of the suffering and death that awaited Him in Jerusalem. Such knowledge would have sent every one of us running in the opposite direction. But not Jesus! He would not be deterred. Not even by His own disciples. Jesus always kept the big picture in mind: The salvation of the world. That's why He desired to share His saving message with as many people on His journey as possible. One such people were the Samaritans. Although the Samaritans shared some of Israel's religious beliefs, they and the Jews were still bitter enemies. So when some messengers arrived to arrange lodging for Jesus and His companions, Luke tells us that the Samaritans, **"Did not welcome Him, because He was heading for Jerusalem"** (v. 53).

Having been rejected from their village, Jesus was prepared to journey on to another village, where He might be welcomed and able to share His saving message with the people there. Two of Jesus' disciples, however, were not so ready to move along. Still burning with anger from the Samaritans' rejection, they asked, "**Lord, do You want us to call fire down from Heaven to destroy them**" (v. 54)? Something tells me that James and John were sure Jesus would give them the go-ahead to wipe those ingrates off the face of the earth. How surprised they must have been when Jesus spun around and unleashed a rebuke on them!

Application:

Perhaps we are just as surprised today to learn that Jesus levels the same rebuke on us. He does so because we are guilty of the same burning anger that led James and John to make such a horrible request. You know the anger I'm talking about too. Perhaps you've experienced the rejection of someone with whom you tried to share the Good News about Jesus. When we experience such rejection, we are just as quick as James and John were to take it personally. We become angry! We hastily cast judgment on all those who thumb their nose at God and His Holy Word. We sit back and hope that they get what they have coming.

What would it mean for us though, if God were as impatient and quick to judge as we sometimes want Him to be? Wouldn't we be on the receiving end of His just wrath and anger? So Jesus rebukes us today, not with fire rained down from Heaven, but with a loving word of correction. He says, "**Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye**" (Luke 6:39, 41)? I don't need to tell you how important it is to be able to see before attempting to lead a hiking expedition to the bottom of the Grand Canyon. Such a "blind" expedition would endanger not only the leader of the group, but also the lives of everyone following him. In the same way, before foolishly attempting to help someone else with his sin, we first need to unload the sins (or baggage) we ourselves are carrying. Whether it's burning anger, bitter resentment, despicable pride, or any other sin committed by us, there is a place where we can drop every one of them off. In fact, they have already been dropped off there for us. The Cross of Calvary! That is the place where God the Father unleashed His full wrath and anger; not on us, but on His only beloved Son, Jesus Christ, because of all the baggage that was on Him.

Transition:

The baggage Christ carried to the cross was not a light load. He traveled to the cross with the sins of the world on His shoulders; a load too heavy for anyone else to carry. Only Jesus, then, could make such a journey! Only Jesus could make such a sacrifice! So *Drop the Baggage you are Carrying!* Drop it all on Jesus! Drop not only the baggage of burning anger, but also...

Part II: The baggage of poor excuses

The Savior's forgiving love moves us to always keep trying to share His love and forgiveness with others, not allowing anyone or anything to deter us. This was the very point Jesus stressed to three would-be followers. Whereas the first man claimed that no sacrifice would be too great and no hardship too difficult, the two other men were quick to make excuses.

One man wanted to bury his father before following Jesus. At first, this appears to be a very legitimate request. We would even expect Jesus to say, "Sure! Go ahead! Take all the time you need. I understand." But instead, He shockingly said, **"Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God"** (v. 60). We cannot be certain whether this man's father died in faith or in unbelief. If in unbelief, what purpose would the funeral serve other than putting a dead body in the ground? Anyone else could easily do that. Jesus had a higher purpose for this man: To go and proclaim the kingdom of God to the living! Another man seemed ready and willing to follow Jesus. He did, however, want to say good-by to his family first. Like the man before him, Jesus also saw into this man's heart and knew that he was making an excuse for not following Him at once. His desire to see his family was a higher priority than following Jesus. But Jesus said such a person, a person who makes excuses, **"Is not fit for service in the kingdom of God"** (v. 62).

Application:

As the all-knowing Son of God, Jesus knew that these would-be followers wanted to try stopping before they even got started in their service to Him. Jesus knows the same about us. He knows our poor excuses when He hears them, no matter how convincing we make our excuses sound. He knows how many times we've passed by opportunities to serve in His church because we've convinced ourselves that we're too busy with work or family responsibilities. He knows how many times we've promised to give more of our dollars to the

work of His kingdom after we've paid this bill or met that financial obligation. But then when the bills are paid, we conveniently find something else to spend our money on. Jesus knows how many times we've had good intentions of faithfully following Him, but then skipped out of coming to church because the weather was too nice outside or because we were too tired or didn't feel like it.

These excuses are nothing more than additional baggage we're carrying around. Are there times when you feel weighed down by a particular excuse you've made or problem you've faced; something that seems heavier than you can carry? If so, drop it on the Lord. Let Him carry it for you. As Jesus lifts those burdens from your shoulders, He assures you of His unconditional love and forgiveness. This love and forgiveness, in turn, equips you and me to help other people in carrying the emotional, physical, and spiritual burdens they're going through. We do this, of course, by lovingly pointing them to the Cross of Christ; encouraging them to drop all their baggage, whatever it may be, on Jesus Alone.

Conclusion:

While at the Grand Canyon I witnessed a helicopter rescue. Apparently some hikers had journeyed to the bottom of the canyon. Once there, however, they were unable to make their way back up. The higher they traveled, the more winded they became, gasping for breath with every additional step. They were literally trapped with 7,000 feet of rock surrounding them.

We were once in a similar situation. We were trapped in the deep and dark canyon known as Hell. Because of the baggage (or sins) we inherited from our parents, we were incapable of climbing out of this canyon. We were trapped there, doomed to suffer its torments for all eternity. Just then, when all hope was lost, Jesus came down from Heaven to rescue us. He said, "You're in an emergency situation here! Give Me your baggage. I will carry it for you. Simply follow Me and you will make it out safely." Following Jesus, then, does not mean taking on extra burdens or additional baggage. No! It means being rid of everything that weighs us down so that we are free to faithfully follow the Lord. So whether it's (1) the baggage of burning anger or (2) the baggage of poor excuses, *Drop the Baggage you are Carrying!* Drop it all on Jesus! Amen!