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St. John's Lutheran Church of Burlington
29 June 2025

Sermon on Luke 9:51-62

Worship Theme:

CHRIST'S CALL FOR COMMITMENT

Some fans follow their team if they make the playoffs. Then there are fans who, regardless of the team's record, watch every game and know stats for every player. There are different types of followers: the half-hearted vs. the committed. Jesus wants followers who are all in. We do not have it inside us to produce that level of commitment. But in the gospel, we see how Jesus went all in for our salvation. As we witness the way Jesus made our eternity the focus of his undivided attention, the Spirit creates within us the very commitment that Christ seeks.

Sermon Theme: "Totally Committed"

How are your New Year's Resolutions going? Didn't see that question coming, did you. These are words you probably haven't heard, said, or even thought about in a good 5 months or more. But do you remember when you were **totally committed** to "New Year, New Me" and how finally this was going to be the year when you succeeded at doing everything you said you would? I'm willing to bet that, if you're like me and almost everyone else, those resolutions didn't last very long. Because it stopped being a new year on January 2nd and by January 10th, you knew that it didn't matter how new the year was, it was still the same old you.

So many things in our lives remind us how bad we are at commitment. We love the thought of commitment, and want other people to be **totally committed** to us! But when it's our turn, we struggle. Any time commitment requires effort and work on our part, and the more we're asked to give, the harder it becomes. Whether it's a relationship that doesn't seem to be going anywhere, a job we have no intention of keeping, or a gym that we purchased a membership for but haven't darkened the door of in ages, commitment is hard. We want it, but only if it's easy.

So what about your faith? Are you **totally committed** to being a Christian? Do you read God's Word as often as you should, come to church anytime services are happening, and do everything God expects you to do exactly the way he said? No, of course you don't. I know this because I don't either. We like the thought of a good Christian life, and probably really want to have one! But not if it's too much work, means we can't do some of the things we love anymore, or means that life might be slightly less comfortable than we think we deserve.

But is that what God said a life of faith would be like? Did Jesus say that being a Christian means you can do whatever you want with no consequences, live a life of luxury and fun, and never need to commit to anything at all? Oddly enough, I don't remember that verse. Here are some words Jesus did say though:

- *Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.* [Mark 8:34]

- *In this world you will have trouble.* [John 16:33]
- *Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.* [Matthew 5:48]

In other words, if you want to be a **totally committed** follower of Jesus, it's going to involve suffering in this world, you will have lots of trouble, and also make sure you do everything God says in his Word perfectly.

I would ask you how that's going for you, but I again already know, because you're like me, and therefore it's not going very well. We've never had a perfect day in our lives, a day when we made no mistakes, did everything God wants, avoided everything God hates, and took all the suffering and rejection of the world with no trouble whatsoever. In fact, even if we didn't go anywhere or see anyone else all day long, we would still be hopelessly lost, because we just don't have the ability to be that **totally committed** to God. We have a sinful nature and a desire for rebellion that puts us on the losing team before we even open our eyes in the morning. Even if we want a life **totally committed** to God, we can't do it.

In Luke chapter 9, we get four pretty quick examples of human beings also struggling to be **totally committed** to Jesus and his mission on earth. First, we see the disciples traveling with Jesus through Samaria, a place not exactly known for its acceptance of the Jewish people. So it's not surprising when they don't allow Jesus to spend the night there. What should be surprising is the disciples' response! "*Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to destroy them?*" Yikes. Not exactly a statement demonstrating **total commitment** to Jesus' mission on earth.

Then Luke shows us three very short conversations in very quick succession. First, a man wants to follow Jesus wherever he goes. So Jesus explains to him just what that would mean – not exactly a life of comfort! Second, Jesus calls a man to follow him, but the man wants to bury his father first. We don't know if the father had even died yet, so it could be a while before this man would be willing to leave home. Jesus says the man should let someone else worry about burials, and he should go proclaim the Word. And third, someone makes what seems to be a pretty reasonable request – *I will follow you, Lord; but first let me say goodbye to my family.* And Jesus says that someone who is always looking back will never see what they need to see in front of them and is therefore unfit for service.

Wow. These words all seem so harsh and unexpected from Jesus and they make him seem very unloving, anti-family, and unrealistic in his expectations! But he is none of those things. Jesus is the most loving being there has ever been, the God who entered his own Creation as a created being in order to save that Creation from eternal destruction. And Jesus is the most pro-family being there has ever been; after all, it is God himself who brought the first family together when he united Adam and Eve as husband and wife in the Garden of Eden and even blessed their marriage with children. And Jesus is not at all unrealistic in his expectations – he knows that if anyone ever wishes to live forever in the perfect glory of heaven, nothing less than perfection will do; we must be completely sinless and **totally committed** to God! Otherwise, we'll never make it.

And because God made us and therefore knows everything about us, he also knows we will never be able to live up to that expectation. So he comes to do it

himself, for us and in our place. This is the best news you and I will hear all day – God doesn't save us because we are **totally committed Christians**; he saves us because we have a **totally committed Christ**.

Luke chapter 9 doesn't just give examples of the lack of **total commitment** human beings have toward Jesus, his Word, and his mission; it also shows us the most perfect example of **total commitment** the world has ever seen. Did you notice it at the beginning of our reading? *Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.* This short line that seems to be doing little more than setting the context for the rest of the reading is actually one of the most important things it says! The original Greek says, "he firmly set his face to proceed to Jerusalem." Think about what your face looks like when you are absolutely determined to do something and not a single thing in the world will prevent you from doing it.

That's Jesus here. Jesus' face is showing his absolute determination to do what must be done to accomplish the mission he came to do: save humanity. Jesus was **totally committed** to you and me and to our eternity, and so off to Jerusalem he went. There he would find a cross on which a punishment and debt which cannot possibly be measured would be endured and paid in full. Nothing in all Creation would prevent him from doing this. Jesus would be the Savior we need.

Why was this so important to him? After all, Jesus is God which means Jesus knows absolutely everything, which means Jesus knew exactly how wishy-washy his followers would sometimes be and how many things would distract us from him and his Word. He knew we do not have anything within us that can make us **totally committed** to him forever.

But that's exactly why this was so important: since we could not do it, he needed to. What people were powerless to do, God himself did. Our Almighty God was so **committed** to saving us that he came into our world to be the perfect Everything for us in the person of Jesus Christ. Then God the Holy Spirit used his Word and sacraments to give us the gift of faith which connects us to Jesus and brings to us every blessing he won for us by his death and resurrection. This faith connection to Jesus is eternally important, because there is no other way to be saved. Jesus is the only way to forgiveness, peace, and eternal life with God.

There is no lasting comfort in something that can end, or something that comes and goes. So God promises to always be with us, to always be focused on us, and to always be **totally committed** to us and our eternity, which is also why he wants to do everything possible to make sure nothing gets between him and us. Because, regardless of how good something might be (home, comfort, family, jobs, rest, vacation, etc.), nothing in this world can ever do for us what Jesus has already done or provide for our eternity like he can. As the Holy Spirit strengthens our faith in Christ, he gives us the very commitment we seek in life. The commitment we so often fail to give to our relationships, jobs, gyms, and countless other things, God gives to us by being **totally committed** himself. Every failure of ours is paid for at the cross of Christ. The Holy Spirit brings forgiveness, peace, and eternal life to us through the very faith he gives as a free gift of grace. We have a **totally committed** relationship with our Savior because of his **total commitment** to us.

Now instead of seeing only our failure to commit in so many areas of our lives, we get to be encouraged, strengthened, and lifted up as we bring God's commitment to us into everything we do. When we are committed to time with him and his Word at home and at church, we receive daily reminders of his committed love for us. When we take his commitment to us and reflect it to the relationships God has blessed us with, we are showing what his amazing love has done in our lives and that we want this love and commitment from God to be in their lives too. Anytime we interact with any other human being, no matter who they are, we have an opportunity to let the light and love of Jesus shine, and that takes "commitment" and makes it much less about us and much more about others. It's not a burden we must bear; it's a privilege we can share. Will we be perfect? No. But our perfect Savior is, and he is **totally committed** to us for this life and for eternity, and he will continue guiding, strengthening, and loving us through every day, helping us to share him in every commitment we have. What a gift – thank you, Jesus! Amen.

And the peace of God which goes beyond all understanding will guard and keep our hearts and our minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.