Luke 9:57-62, Joshua 3:14-17

“Cold Feet”

Well, what was your week like? I missed all of you so much. You read my email this when and I was out in Seattle driving cross country in a 24 foot rental truck and just got home this Friday. If you did not and are not getting my emails from me on a weekly basis and you want them then please write down your email address right now on a slip of paper and put it in an offering plate.

I made the drive with my good friend Ken Mahaffey who is the Putnam County tax collector. Remember that Sunday, Ken, when you were the lay reader and the Scripture was by chance, the reading about Jesus and the tax collector? Well a preacher and a tax collector were driving cross country and we had quite an adventure. We originally rented a 16 footer and discovered that it was too small so we had to go back and get a 24 footer. As we headed out for the trip we realized that there was a speed block on it so it couldn’t go faster than 55mph. Now, when you are driving 3,000 miles that makes a huge difference. I did the calculations in my head and realized that if we drove straight from Tuesday on we would arrive here on Saturday evening. It was doable. I wasn’t happy, it wasn’t what I wanted, we weren’t going to get any sleep, but we could do it. So off we went and no turning back.

About 2 hours out I noticed in the cabin that there was a light on in the cab on a button that had the letter D on it with a line through it. I pressed that button, the light went off, and the truck took off like it was a jet taking off the runway. I could go as fast as I wanted, and I did, and we arrived Friday evening at 4 and had two very comfortable and long nights of sleep on Wednesday and Thursday. It is great to be home and my next enews letters will be written from my office here in Strasburg and not from a Starbuck’s or a McDonalds for many months to come.

We have two great Scriptures for today as we continue our sermon series of walking in His footsteps. They both lay out for us what happens if we allow ourselves to resign ourselves to following Jesus and the life that results is always one in which Christ is at the center and we are protected and able to carry out His desires in our life.

We are called as a church and as individuals to not turn back once we have set our minds and our hearts on Christ. Let’s see what that means to us today as we read our second Scripture.

**READ**

This Sunday is a wonderful celebration as we baptize three babies. There is nothing like children to remind us of why we do what we do on Sunday. A church without the cry of a baby or the tiny voices of kids filling the sanctuary during all the times of worship is a dead church. But, today as part of baptism we have a responsibility. You will make promises to help the families as they raise their kids in this church. The whole concept of it takes a village to raise a child becomes it takes a church to raise a child here today.

If a youth of this church stumbles then we have not taken our responsibility seriously. Now, the parents also make promises and if they do not allow that child to be brought up in the church, well shame on them. But when that child steps into this church and is out and about we are all responsible to help them grow up in the faith.

Today in Luke, Jesus gives us some really clear understandings of what it would be like to follow Jesus in the 1st century and what would be required of us. He didn’t want those disciples who signed on to get into something that they couldn’t ultimately do. Look at the Luke passage. In essence he tells them, and here he is speaking to us as well, that our loyalty to Jesus has to be greater than our need for physical comfort and our need for family security. That sounds harsh, doesn’t it.

I have a couple stories as illustrations: In Moscow I preached a sermon on allowing ourselves to focus on what is the most important priority in our life which is being a disciple of Jesus Christ above all things, even family. If we are having sleepless nights then it is probably because our priorities are not arranged correctly. A woman in our church who was about to buy a house heard this sermon and knew that she was having sleepless nights because she was worried about making the payments. She talked to her husband and they agreed not to buy the house. They told the sellers and the next day the sellers came back and offered a substantially lower price in the range in which they could afford. She told me, once we let go of it I slept so well the next two nights, and then we were able to buy the house anyway. It was just a matter of allowing Jesus to take priority and not obsessing over a material thing.

If our need for physical comfort rises above our devotion to Christ then we have not fully committed to Christ. The same is seen in Jesus’ statement about family. This is harder because the choice isn’t put to us as choose this day whom you will serve: the devil or God. That is a no brainer, we can all answer that one. It isn’t a choice between something bad and something good. It is a choice between a good and healthy relationship and a correctly prioritized primary relationship with God.

When we were serving in Russia we had a ministry with the Muslim community through the United Nations High Commission on Refugees. They would refer refugees to us and we would give them a monthly food bag worth about $60. We had over 200 families represented and most of them came from Iraq, Afghanistan and other African Muslim countries. During our ministry a young man came to know Christ as Savior, which is great, right? But when a Muslim comes to know Jesus then his family has a responsibility not just to shun him but to actually kill him. It is their obligation. We had ot hide him and find a way to get him into Canada where he now lives. He could have abandoned his relationship with God which would have given him his relationship to his family back, but he chose Jesus and didn’t look back.

When you step into this church and make promises to follow Jesus Christ then you make a commitment. You have put you hand to the plow. We need to know what we are getting into when we say that we believe in Jesus Christ. It probably means more than we realize, or maybe more than we are actually living out.

And that takes us to our Joshua Scripture. We are still taking a journey together through the Holy Land. I went to the place where supposedly this crossing took place. The day before we had been to the Jordan and baptized 7 adults. I did more adult baptisms in Moscow than in all 15 of my other years of ministry combined. It was just a place where your responsibility and the recognition of what you are getting into could not be avoided.

The morning we came to the crossing which was not on our agenda to go visit, it was a bonus from our guide. Across the Jordan was, well, the country of Jordan. It was maybe 30 feet across. It was very peaceful, you couldn’t tell if it was moving or not. It wasn’t in the least bit intimidating.

But vs. 15 changes all of that. Those of us living here in this part of the world over this last month understand how a quiet stream can quickly turn into a raging, angry, deathly current of water. That is what was facing the nation of Israel. Probably a little more context is needed.

Moses frees the people of Israel and on the way toward the promised land that God had told them was theirs, they complain constantly. They worship a golden calf and time after time turn back after putting their hand to the plow. They were not able to trust that God loved them, would protect them, and would fulfill his promise of taking them to the promised land. For 40 years they wander, Moses dies, and Joshua is given the reign.

This Scripture that we read is that of Israel officially crossing the Jordan for the first time to get into the promises land that God had said would be theirs. It was the culmination of prophecy and the real climax for the people of God revealing himself to them. He tells them, in order to cross into the promised land your priests have to step into the raging flood waters of the Jordan and when they do I will perform a miracle.

This is very different from Charlton Heston standing up away from the Red Sea and parting the waters with his staff as Moses did. This was the priests carrying the ark of the covenant putting their hand to the plow, not looking backward and trusting that God would deliver as they stepped into the flood waters. I was asked about cold feet in reference to my sermon. Was it a literal reference like when the bride or groom gets cold feet and doesn’t want to go through with what was planned, or literal cold feet when your feet are in the water. I said both.

The priest could have had cold feet and turned back from the raging waters and said no, let’s let another generation do this. But they didn’t. They had to get cold feet by putting their feet into the raging waters.

The center of this Scripture lies in these verses where the priests put their feet in the water, they put God’s commandments over their bodily comforts, and the waters parted. They stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the raging Jordan while the nation passed through.

Our take for this is that God helps them when, and only when, they obey his command for radical obedience. When we give up our reliance on ourselves, on our need for certain things, then God is able to come through. One example of this I have seen in my marital counseling, and specifically in my divorce counseling where kids are involved. More often than not the fighting happens more around the money and properties that are involved and the kids are used as leverage to make sure we get what we want. I have seen it happen many, many times.

My advice in all of these cases has been consistent and I think is consistent with this Scripture. Let the other person get everything they ask for, and see what happens. I need to tell you that only a handful of nearly 100 people that I have counseled during divorce proceedings, have agreed to that. But those that have, have seen an incredible miracle of the sea parting and God revealing Himself in a miraculous way and what was once thought impossible for the children and for material goods as well, was made possible. But it is hard to step into the waters and give up all reliance on self and things and then turn to God. But when we do, amazing things happen.

My last example comes from history. Hernando Cortes had a plan, he wanted to lead an expedition into Mexico to obtain its many treasures. He presented his plan to the Spanish governor, who was so excited that he gave him eleven ships and seven hundred men. Cortes did not tell the men or the governor the complete plan. After months of travel the eleven ships landed in Veracruz. Cortes had the men unload everything from all eleven ships. As they headed into their new adventure the men turned back and saw all eleven ships burning! Their reaction was to fight back, as surely an enemy had initiated such an attack. Cortes halted the men, as this was in his plan, he had ordered the ships to all be burned. Cortes did not know what he and his men would encounter in their expeditions. What he did know was that by "Burning the Ships" he had completely eliminated their option of going back. At the same time creating an intensely powerful motivation to succeed.