



THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUNE 20, 2019

LUKE 9: 51-62

“NO MORE BIG BUTS”

As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, “Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?” But Jesus turned and rebuked them. Then he and his disciples went to another village. As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” He said to another man, “Follow me.” But he replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.” Jesus replied, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”

- It’s no good to have a big but.
- And I am so tired of big buts.
- And Jesus is not putting up with any more big buts in the Gospel.
- If you think I’m talking about rearends, your minds are in the gutter.
- After all, as a Pastor I never have buts on my mind.
- But Jesus? He runs into one silent but and two big buts. Maybe a silent but is a good thing, you never know....
- Because things are heating up as Jesus makes his way to Jerusalem. He is running into opposition. Which always happens when someone has a new message. Many people hear a new message as nothing but a criticism of the old message. Whereas a new message is trying to breathe new life into a stale situation.

- In the face of opposition, perhaps Jesus feels the need for a bigger band of disciples—the need for new people to join his old band of disciples because he begins to encourage people to join him as he travels toward Jerusalem.
- First, he has a volunteer, “I will follow you wherever you go.”
 - Sounds great.
- But, Jesus responds, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”
- This is the silent but, “Oh, I thought I’d have at least three hots and a cot. Thanks, but no thanks, Jesus.” And the man leaves without joining the new movement.
- Jesus says to another man, “Follow me.” But he replies, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”
 - Sounds reasonable.
- And, at first glance, Jesus’ response seems harsh, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the Kingdom of God.”
- Biblical scholars tell us that this man is trying to finesse Jesus with a big but. In the day, sons live with the family until the father dies. He is saying, “but **after** my father dies and, who knows when that will be, then I will follow you.” Jesus rejects his big but.
- Jesus says to another man, “Follow me.” But he replies, “Lord, let me first go back and say goodbye to my family.”
- Deb said to me recently, “Have you noticed that people in Pittsburgh never just say goodbye? That the conversation goes on for five more minutes and then it’s goodbye.”
- Well, in the Middle East, saying goodbye to the family is a major event.
- “Oh, you’re leaving? We’re going to have to call all the relatives. And have a big party. And then tell all the old family stories. And eat some more. And wait two days more days for Aunt Irene to get in from Nazareth.”
- A Middle Eastern goodbye could take a week or more.

- Just another big but.
- And then we have this puzzling saying from Jesus, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the Kingdom of God.”
- The meaning became clear to me when working with people in psychotherapy.
- The Kingdom of God is about a new way of living in the world, that replaces the old way. And, once a person is plowing a new path, it is dangerous to turn around and go back to how you were living before.
- If you think of the plowing image, it would be like turning around and tearing up all that you had already planted.
- Psychologically and spiritually, to go back on a new path of life rips up all the new growth and causes severe damage to the soul. We must not stop our forward movement.
- In all three cases, the big buts have to do with remaining stuck in the old ways, the old traditions, the old way of life.
- “I like my comfort, Jesus. I know where everything is in my life, even though it’s not working all that well. I don’t want to head out where there is no guarantee of creature comforts.”
- “Jesus, I have family obligations. I need to keep with the way the family has always done things. The way we’ve always done them here in Pittsburgh. Yinz understand, you jagoff.”
- “You mean I am just supposed to take off without waiting around until my father dies to have my own life? But then I’ll likely have to stay and take care of mom.”
- There’s always a thousand reasons not to do something. There’s always a reason to stick out your big but! The motto would be “Just **don’t** do it!”
- But Jesus says no if’s, ands, or buts. Jesus stands firm: “Follow me.”
- This later leads Martin Luther to say “Peace if possible. The truth at all costs.”

- Jesus and Luther resist making sure everyone is happy and stick with the truth at all costs. I'll follow them....
- Paul Bell spoke with a woman at our Synod Assembly who had suggested to the leaders of her congregation that they start *occasionally* using a guitar at worship.
- She was told right away, “Oh, **but**—and she named a key family in the congregation—would not like that.”
- There it is: Peace at all costs. Same old thing. Same old dying thing.
- This week I was just told that the Presbyterian Church in this area will close 70 churches this year. Mainline churches are dying at alarming rates, **but** they sure thought the old way, the old message, the old direction would continue to work.
- Wayne Gretsky says “You miss a hundred percent of the shots you don’t take.”
- What does God declare again and again in the scriptures: “Behold, I make all things new!”
- Follow me! A new message! A new direction! The new Kingdom of God has arrived.
- **But, but, but, but!**
- Older adults were asked about their best decision and worst decision as they looked back on life.
- Their answer was the same in both cases.
- The best decision was trying that thing in life they had always wanted to do, even when it was not successful.
- Their worst decision was never attempting to fulfill that dream in life. Living in regret and never knowing how it might have turned out.
- Big old buts stopped them.

- My mentor in seminary summed it up this way: it's too late to decide to be a brain surgeon at fifty.
- The longer we "but" the new message, the new path, the new change, the harder it becomes. The buts become hard to climb over. Now that's an image to take home with you!
- You know, we have such pathetic notions of sin, like smoking, drinking, gambling, cussing, pre-marital sex. What Richard Rohr calls the "hot sins."
- What about sin as shrinking back from your life?
- What about sin as unfulfilled potential?
- What about sin as paths in life never taken?
- What about sin as playing it safe your whole life?
- Did you see the article about the ninety-year-old woman who asked the local police to arrest her because she had always lived such a safe, good life that she was sick of it?
- Now there's someone who is still alive!
- She got over her big but!
- She wanted to experience risk. Take a chance.
- No more big buts!
- My dear friends, I am so proud of what is happening here at CLC.
- The Church Council has gone from a room full of big buts to a forward thinking and fun group.
- Mandy and Jackie and the Carnival Team are doing a fantastic job of creating a fun event for the whole community.
- Anchorpoint Counseling Ministry and CLC will launch the Millvale Community Counseling Center in September.

- The Church Council is working to create a lasting solution for the finances and care of the Cemetery.
- Jade Lane is putting her heart into the re-birth of our Youth Group.
- Steve Slepecki is heading to seminary and, potentially, we have two more persons thinking about seminary.
- We are preparing for the launch of *Higher Ground*, our Saturday Contemporary Service, including doing a bit of refiguring of space to the Chancel and pews so we get the musicians and instruments up off the floor so there is room to move around.
- Our Capital Campaign continues. Honestly, we need five or more families to make major contributions.
- Ed and the Choir are revitalizing our traditional music ministry.
- Our Christian Education Team has selected a new, contemporary and exciting curriculum that goes from Pre-K to High School.
- And more is happening. We are doing it. No more big buts.
- We are being Christ to our neighbor. We are finding and following Christ as he appears in one another....
- What is the hallmark of a healthy person? Initiative is the hallmark of a healthy person, spiritually and psychologically.
- Initiative is the power or opportunity to take charge.
- Jesus says, "Follow me."
- I will. Will you?
- No more big buts!
- SERMON SONGS: **AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL** BY RAY CHARLES