

# “Come and follow me ...

*... learn from me; eat with me; join in”*

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*A sermon given on the Second Sunday of Trinity 25<sup>th</sup> May 2022 by the Associate Vicar the Revd Wendy Wale in Beverley Minster*

*Luke 9:51-end; Galatians 5:1, 13-25*

So, just before the start of the pandemic, in a burst of enthusiasm, I signed up for Park Run. Every Saturday morning at 09:00, hundreds of would-be runners or joggers meet all over the country in 772 locations to be exact, to complete a five kilometre course run by volunteers. Here in Beverley as I know many of you know, it takes place on the Westward and is hugely well-supported. The Park Run movement was started by an individual with the goal of encouraging fun, free ways of exercising and motivating others to do the same. Every week, I get sent an email from the Park Run team encouraging me to keep running, informing me of meetings and achievements and goals. During the lockdown, people run their own isolated park runs, submitting their times and maintaining the spirit of unity. It's a wonderful thing. But here's my confession: I've never done a Park Run. In fact, I haven't actually been for a run since halfway through the pandemic. Now I have my excuses: various injuries; getting a bit older; bits that ache; a lack of time; it's too cold; it's too hot; it's too wet; the dog needs a walk. But with or without me, the Park Run keeps on going.

Jesus also started a movement, one that anyone could join free of charge, one that encouraged people to follow him, to live differently, to get involved, to change the world. His movement was called the Kingdom of God and it keeps on moving. Each of us is invited to enter into a relationship with him, to follow his way of life in community, with other disciples. Whether or not people join it, it keeps going, growing, evolving and motivating. We see this in our reading. Jesus and his followers are on the move towards Jerusalem and they're rejected by the Samaritan villages. Now, the disciples at this point still think that the Kingdom of God will involve some kind of big power struggle and a victory that will be theirs, even if that involves violence. And so the disciples here say, "Shall we command fire to come down from heaven and to consume all these people who are rejecting you?" But Jesus rebukes them and they move on. Because this is not a triumphant journey sweeping all

resistance aside - this is the progress of the Gospel, the Gospel of the Kingdom, a message of grace and love.

Now, you may have been shouted at by the preacher on the High Street here in Beverly, or experienced violent or coercive attempts to make someone follow Jesus or believe a particular doctrine. This is not the way of the Kingdom. And please do seek some support if this has been your experience, because Jesus's invitation is always simple and kind: *'Come and follow me; learn from me; eat with me; join in, we're going places.'* He doesn't actually even stop to check if anyone has accepted the invitation - he certainly doesn't force anyone. He and the disciples move on to the next village.

But then there are those who want to join Jesus, but just like me and the Park Run, have their excuses and we heard them in our reading. They were good excuses: I need to bury my father; I want to tidy up my affairs; I have to focus on what I'm doing now. And it's not that Jesus doesn't hear the excuses, it's just that his kingdom is looking forwards, not backwards; moving onwards, not staying still. His responses sound harsh, but just as I always had a good excuse not to run, there are always plenty of excuses where we may turn away from the thing God is calling us to do. And sometimes we need to face that: I'm too busy to go to that prayer meeting; I've got family commitments on a Sunday; I can't give any money because we're saving for a holiday; I can't support that project because I'm needed elsewhere; I haven't got time to speak to that person, I need to catch up with my friends; I really can't forgive them - that's just too painful.

These may all be valid. We've probably all thought or said them. And it's really important that we recognise that we can't do everything and we don't actually need to do anything in order to be loved by God. But sometimes we know when we are being directly nudged by Jesus, either to find out more about who he is or to join in a kingdom activity that's the next step on our journey.

As followers of Jesus, we receive the Holy Spirit, and our reading from Galatians reminds us that when we seek to live by the Spirit, our lives will produce fruit. You see, once I do start running again, I'll gain muscles, I'll have stronger lungs, increased resistance, perhaps a bit less flab and hopefully plenty of endomorphines. But I have to actually start running - I have to make a plan, set my alarm, put on my

running gear, accept the initial pain and effort and keep on making the time and effort.

As we choose to live for God's kingdom, we will produce the fruit of the Spirit - love and joy, peace and patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. But it doesn't happen overnight. It doesn't happen just because we think about it or get lots of emails about it, or even talk about it. It takes time and effort and our continued engagement.

We are called to pray, to worship, to read the Bible, to spend time with other Christians, to listen, to learn, to ask questions, to consider what Jesus would do in all areas of our lives. We can't do it on our own. We do it together as a community, gradually becoming the people we were made to be, reflecting the image and likeness of God wherever we go.

And our final hymn this morning sums up all I have to say far more beautifully than I ever could.

*"Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?"* - imagining Jesus speaking to us -

*"Will you go where you don't know and will never be the same? Will you let my love be shown? Will you let my name be known? Will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?"*

It begins with the call of Jesus. It speaks of his kingdom living in the power of his spirit. And it ends with a final verse, which, if we choose to sing it, are powerful words coming from our own hearts.

*"Lord, your summons echoes true when you but call my name; let me turn and follow you and never be the same. In Your company, I'll go where your love and footsteps show. Thus I'll move and live and grow in you and you in me"*

I invite you all to spend some time this week reflecting on what journey might Jesus be calling you on at this time - and I promise I'll let you know when I finally make a Park Run.

## Reading Texts

### Luke 9:51-end

<sup>51</sup> When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. <sup>52</sup> And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; <sup>53</sup> but they did not receive him, because his face was set towards Jerusalem. <sup>54</sup> When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, 'Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?' <sup>55</sup> But he turned and rebuked them. <sup>56</sup> Then they went on to another village. <sup>57</sup> As they were going along the road, someone said to him, 'I will follow you wherever you go.' <sup>58</sup> And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.' <sup>59</sup> To another he said, 'Follow me.' But he said, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father.' <sup>60</sup> But Jesus said to him, 'Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.' <sup>61</sup> Another said, 'I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home.' <sup>62</sup> Jesus said to him, 'No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.'