Sermon – The Way of the Cross
Sunday March 8, 2026

Has someone ever asked you to do something and your response was, "Yes… but"?

- A friend asks you, "Can you help me move this weekend?" and you respond with, "Yes, I'd love to… but I need to clean the toilets this weekend."
- Your spouse says, "Can we talk tonight? I really need you." and you respond with, "Yes… but I'm tired. Maybe tomorrow."
- Your doctor says, "You need to change your diet and start exercising." and you respond with, "Yes… but this isn't a good time."

We're all experts at saying "yes… but." It sounds encouraging and positive. Sometimes it even sounds spiritual. But if we're honest, what are we really saying? Usually, we're saying something like:

- Yes, I agree… but as long as it doesn't disrupt me.
- Yes, I'm willing… but as long as it doesn't cost me.
- Yes, I'm open… but as long as I stay in control.

Over time, "yes… but" can become a polite way to protect our comfort, schedules and preferences — without technically saying no.

I see this in my own life. I'm an introvert, and my weeks are often packed. By the end of the week, I'm usually tired. And all I want is some quiet.

So if someone reaches out and wants to connect, sometimes my first thought can be, "Yes… but I'm tired." And to be fair, boundaries and self-care are important.

But if I'm really honest, sometimes it's not just about boundaries and self-care. Sometimes it's about comfort and convenience. I'm afraid of being stretched too thin. And in those moments, I can prioritize protecting my energy over showing love — even when Jesus might be nudging me.

And that that makes me wonder.

- What if the biggest barrier in our spiritual lives isn't that we're rejecting Jesus outright — but that we're setting conditions for our obedience?
- What if it isn't the problem isn't that we're blatantly saying "no" to Jesus – but that we're saying, "Yes… but"?

How do we move from a "yes… but" faith to giving Jesus a wholehearted "yes"?

Sermon Series

We're in sermon series called *On the Way with Jesus*. One of the central themes in Luke's gospel is the idea of being "on the way." Jesus is constantly on the move, heading towards Jerusalem and the cross. And on the way, he's teaching his disciples what it means to follow him.

Over the next several weeks, we'll be studying the book of Luke and learning what Jesus has to say. Our hope is that we won't just learn more about Jesus. Our hope is that as we walk with him "on the way", Jesus will teach us, challenge us and transform us.

Today, we're talking about The Way of the Cross, and our passage is Luke 9:51-62.

Background

Now before we dive into our passage, let's set the scene.

Up to this point in Luke's gospel, the first eight chapters have focused mostly on Jesus' miracles: raising a widow's son, calming a storm, feeding the five thousand. These stories show us who Jesus is.

Then in chapter nine, the focus starts to shift. It moves from what Jesus can do to what his call to follow him really means.

In verse 20, Peter makes a stunning declaration: Jesus isn't just a prophet or miracle worker. Jesus is the Messiah – the long-awaited Saviour who's bringing God's healing into this world and establishing God's kingdom.

And right after this, Jesus begins to prepare his disciples. He doesn't say, Everything's going to be easy now. Instead he says:

Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. [24] For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. (Luke 9:23-24)

Now from chapter 9 to chapter 18, there's a word that keeps coming up. It's not the word admire, observe or agree with. It's the word: *follow*.

As Jesus walks towards Jerusalem, he keeps coming back to the question, What does it mean to *follow* me? That's where we find ourselves today. Luke writes:

As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. (Luke 9:51)

This is a turning point. The momentum of the whole Gospel shifts here. Jesus isn't wandering from village to village anymore. He's moving with purpose. He knows exactly where he's going.

The phrase "he resolutely set out" can also be translated "he set his face." It echoes the words of the suffering servant in Isaiah: **I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame. (Isaiah 50:7)**

This is the language of determination, courage and clarity. This is a picture of someone who knows that hardship, rejection and suffering are waiting for him, but he chooses that path anyway.

Can you imagine that? Knowing what's waiting for you… and still stepping forward?

From this moment on, Jesus knows he doesn't have much more time. He knows the disciples aren't ready yet. So along the way, he teaches them what it means to follow him.

What I want to do today is look at how Jesus' call to discipleship does two very personal things for us: It reshapes our understanding of mercy, and it reorders our priorities.

1. Jesus' call reshapes our understanding of mercy

Jesus begins his journey to Jerusalem by intentionally going through Samaria. And this detail is important. Why?

Because Jews and Samaritans were long-standing enemies. Samaritans were considered ethnic traitors and "half-breeds" who had intermarried with pagans and strayed from the faith. Tensions between the two groups ran deep.

And when Jesus arrives in a Samaritan village, they refuse to welcome him.

James and John are outraged. They tell Jesus to call down fire from heaven and destroy the people. Now, I know it's easy for us to judge them. But let's remember, they're just following a biblical precedent.

They're thinking about the story of the prophet Elijah and the time he called down fire from heaven to destroy the soldiers sent to arrest him. Twice.

From their perspective, they're defending Jesus and protecting his honour. But instead of commending them, what does Jesus do? He rebukes them. Why?

Because from the very beginning, Jesus has been showing them that his kingdom is radically different. It's not defined by ethnicity, retaliation or grudges.

Earlier, Jesus had told them what to do if a town rejected them: receive hospitality if it's offered. And if it's not, shake the dust off your feet and move on. No fire. No payback. Just trust God and continue with the mission.

You see, what the disciples don't yet understand is that this journey to Jerusalem isn't a march to destroy God's enemies. It's a journey to die for them.

And that changes everything.

Can we just pause for a moment and admit how hard this is for us to do?

Our world is so divided. There are political divides, cultural divides, theological divides. Social media has a way of turning things nasty and setting people against each other.

I'll be honest — there are times when I'm scrolling online or watching the news, and I feel extremely so disturbed and frustrated: *What is happening in this world? How can people think like that? How can people act like that?*

And it can be so easy for that frustration to turn into anger and for the people I disagree with to become in my mind, the enemy.

But Jesus calls us to a different way. He doesn't say we have to agree with everyone or pretend the differences aren't there. He calls us to mercy, he calls us to choose love, even when we'd rather strike back.

Following Jesus means:

- We don't respond to rejection with revenge.
- We don't respond to offense with outrage.
- We respond to people with the same mercy we've received from Jesus.

So what would that look like for you? What would it look like to show mercy to the people who've hurt you, rejected you, betrayed you?

It's not easy. These things hurt. And our natural instinct is to protect ourselves and even hurt back.

But Jesus shows us another way. Because Jesus was rejected, misunderstood, betrayed — and he still chose mercy. You see, mercy doesn't ignore the pain.

- Mercy refuses to let resentment rule our hearts.
- Mercy entrusts the people and situation to God.
- Mercy chooses love even when it's hard.

Can you imagine what that would look like in our world today? In a world of outrage and retaliation,

- Mercy would stand out.
- Mercy would make people take notice.
- Mercy would point to the One who refused to call down fire on His enemies but instead chose to die for them.

Jesus' call to discipleship reshapes how we understand mercy.

2. Jesus' call to discipleship reorders our priorities

Now after this encounter in Samaria, Jesus and his disciples keep walking on to the next village. Along the way, Jesus meets three different people. What they all have in common is this — they respond to Jesus with a "yes… but".

So Jesus uses this moment to teach his disciples — and us — about the cost of following him. **Discipleship is not about *adding* Jesus to your life. It's about *reordering* your life around Him.** It's about giving him first place in every area of our lives.

a) Yes… but only if it's easy

The first person says, **I will follow you wherever you go. (Luke 9:57)**

Sounds great, right? But Jesus knows his heart. This man is coming to him because he's seen the miracles and the buzz. And he's here because he wants admiration, status and comfort.

So Jesus doesn't sugarcoat it. **Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head. (Luke 9:58)**

In other words, he's saying following me isn't about comfort. It will be hard. You can't just join because it's exciting. True discipleship requires trust, even when it's uncomfortable.

This first person says, Yes I'll follow… but only if it's easy. Think about your own life for a moment. Where do you want faith to feel easy, convenient, or safe? Jesus calls us to trust him even in the messy, hard parts of life.

b) Yes… but only when it's convenient

In the second encounter, Jesus invites a man to follow him. But the man says, **Lord, first let me go and bury my father. (Luke 9:59)**

Now at first glance, this seems reasonable. In that culture, burying a parent was a sacred duty and obligation.

But Jesus sees what's really in his heart. His father wasn't actually dead, in those days, people were typically buried within hours of dying. This isn't about honouring a father, it's about postponing obedience.

And if we're honest, don't we do the same thing?

- I'll spend more time with God when life settles down.
- I'll serve when my schedule eases up.
- I'll give generously when I have more money.

Sometimes waiting is necessary. But often, waiting is just an excuse. According to Jesus, discipleship doesn't wait. Jesus calls us to wholehearted obedience today, not when it's convenient.

The second person says, Yes I'll follow… but only when it's convenient. Where in your life are you been holding back? Where have you been waiting for things to get more convenient before following Jesus?

c) Yes… but I'm still looking back

The third person says, **I'll follow you Lord, but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family. (Luke 9:61).** In other words, Yes… but I'm not ready to let go.

Again, this seems reasonable. This seems respectful even loving. It reminds us of Elisha, who asked to say goodbye to his parents before following Elijah (1 Kings 19:19–21).

But Jesus responds differently. He sees the heart. He knows this isn't just a farewell; it's hesitation. This man wants to keep the door open because part of him isn't ready to let go.

Looking back can hold us back too. Lot's wife looked back at Sodom and it cost her everything. The Israelites longed for Egypt instead of stepping into the Promised Land. Comfort and familiarity can tempt us and keep us from the new life Jesus wants to give.

That's why Jesus says: **No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God. (Luke 9:62).**

Think of it like plowing a rocky field. If you look back, your plow will hit a rock, veer off course, or snap. Discipleship calls us to look forward — to where Jesus is leading, to what he's asking, and to who he's shaping us to become. Following Jesus requires looking forward in faith.

The third person says, Yes I'll follow… but I'm still looking back. Think about your life for a moment. Are you looking ahead to where Jesus is leading? Or are you looking back, holding on to the past and letting to keep you stuck in your faith?

In these encounters, we see three common ways we put conditions on our obedience to Jesus.

- "Yes… but only if it's easy."
- "Yes… but only when it's convenient."
- "Yes… but I'm still looking back."

Different words. Different situations. But the same issue — Jesus isn't first. Jesus' call to discipleship reorders our priorities.

So take a moment and ask yourself, what's your "yes… but"?

Because that's what this passage is really about. **Discipleship isn't about *adding* Jesus to your life. It's about *reordering* your life around Him.**

- Jesus doesn't settle for partial allegiance.
- He doesn't compete for second place.
- He doesn't care for our "yes… but".

Jesus says: Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me. The truth is, we all want Jesus as our Saviour. We want forgiveness. We want love. We want peace.

But following him as Lord means letting him lead us, shape us and challenge us. And this is where it gets personal. Maybe for you, following Jesus today means:

- Forgiving someone who hurt you even though it's hard.
- Choosing kindness instead of walking away from a difficult person.
- Being generous when your instinct is to hold on to what you have.
- Letting go of comfort to serve and love others.
- Sharing your faith instead of staying quiet.

- Trusting God with circumstances that feel overwhelming instead of trying to control everything yourself.
- Humbling asking for God's wisdom instead of trying to figure it out yourself.
- Giving your life to Jesus instead of living for yourself.

Take a moment and reflect:

- Where is Jesus asking you to trust him – even though it feels scary?
- Where is he asking you to let go – even though it feels uncomfortable?
- Where is he inviting you to move from admiration to obedience?

Because this isn't about checking off a spiritual check list. This is about who sits on the throne of your life.

Jesus isn't looking for fans, he's looking for followers. And following Jesus means saying Yes – not yes… but, not yes… when, not yes… if. Just yes.