

Lord keep us from running where You do not send us, but give us grace to go willingly when You call. Teach us that Your power is made perfect in weakness. Amen. (Book of Family Prayer, p. 453)

As they were going along the road, someone said to [Jesus], "I will follow you wherever you go." 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." To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." And Jesus said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Yet another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves.

In Christ Jesus, who calls us to follow Him in our various vocations relying on His strength to help us to fulfill the work He has given us to do, dear fellow redeemed:

When you have applied for a job, have you not normally thought you were qualified for it? You assessed your strengths and included them in your resume' no doubt. You spoke of them freely in your interview even boastfully. This is how it works in this life. An employer is seeking someone who will be a strong candidate to accomplish the work that he or she has determined needs to be done.

But in following Christ, He calls us not based on our strengths but despite our many weaknesses He calls us and promises to work through us with all our foibles and inabilities. We see this in our text and are confronted with what our Lord has done in calling us to follow Him in this life. In every one of our cases this is true: **Vulnerable Lambs Are Called to Follow Their Invincible Lord.**

I

After a night of utter failure, the disciples in our Gospel lesson were working diligently on their equipment in the hope of having a better night at work in about another 16 hours. Perhaps they were wondering if they

should find different work at which they might prove more successful. Overwhelmed by their inabilities, Jesus had them do something contrary to everything they had learned about fishing in the Sea of Galilee. He granted them superabundant success.

Our text begins with three individuals that were willing to consider Jesus' call to follow Him, but all on their own terms. The first and third approached Jesus as volunteers. The first one said: "I will follow you wherever you go." But Jesus knew he was not fully prepared for what this meant, so He responded: "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." Was he prepared to follow Jesus in a life under the cross?

The third, probably hearing the exchange with the other two said: "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." In response to this condition Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." That may seem harsh, but our Lord is not looking for divided loyalties, a distracted follower who from the beginning has his priorities misplaced.

The second individual does not appear to be seeking a position as Jesus' follower, at least not in such a forthright fashion as the other two. But Jesus nevertheless calls him: "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." And Jesus said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Again we do not know if this man did follow Jesus, but obviously the call of Jesus, as important as it was, did not seem that urgent to him.

What all three had in common was that they were approaching Jesus' calling to follow Him from their superior abilities and expectations of and for themselves. In contrast we move on in our text by reading: "After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them ..." These others were different from those three. Perhaps the difference can be found in Jesus' observation about them: "behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves."

II

You probably recall the Apostle Paul telling us about his thorn in the flesh in his second letter to the Corinthians. No doubt he thought he would be able to do the work of a missionary far better without that physical malady that God had given him. But our Lord Jesus tells him: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness", to which

Paul responds: “Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

So it is with each one of us my fellow redeemed, followers of the Lord Jesus. Not all of us have been called to preach and teach the Word of our Lord publicly. But we have all been called to follow Jesus in our several vocations bearing witness to the truth of God’s love for all in His Son. Through our honest labors, through our gracious words, through our acts of kindness and compassion in all our interactions with the many neighbors God places in our lives, we bear witness to the love that He has worked in us through faith.

It is the way of the world that in order to succeed one must become rude and crude in word and deed. Repaying evil for evil or reviling for reviling is the way of the world, but not so among us who know and follow the Lord Jesus. He has set us free from our sin and all its bitterness to bless our neighbors. We are the lambs sent out among wolves. But as vulnerable as this leaves us, we serve an invincible Lord, who promises to protect into life everlasting.

Jesus has not promised that we will have a life of ease in following Him in this life. We will suffer in many ways even at the hands of our Lord’s enemies, many Christians have been put to death for confessing Christ, but we are safe, eternally safe.

The invincibility of our Lord is found in the greater struggle against the powers of darkness, the kingdom of Satan. After all, Jesus was falsely charged and placed upon the cross of execution. Jesus died and was buried, no invincibility observed in those actions. But in truth it was God the Father, who put His Son upon that cross of suffering for you and me and all sinners. He was charged with all our sin by the Father. There upon that instrument of torture and execution the Son of God endured the eternal punishment for our sin. The kingdom of Satan did not overcome the sinless Son of God who died for us. His body did not decompose and greater yet it rose from the dead, promising us, who follow Him, resurrection and life.

This is the One you and I are called to follow and serve in this life, my fellow redeemed. We with all our weaknesses have been called to such a life, for the purpose that others might hear of this invincible One who suffered, died and rose again for them as well. Stop searching for your strengths as though God is recognizing them in calling you and that somehow He owes you gratitude and reward. Find yourself doing what

the Apostle was led to do: *boast all the more gladly of your weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon you.*

Peter, in our Gospel lesson, saw his weaknesses as a sinner and told our Lord: "Depart from me, the sinner!" He no doubt wanted to fix himself up with a stronger resume', fit to follow the Lord Jesus. But instead Jesus called him to a new vocation in His service. You and can take heart in this that for all our boastful strivings we have forgiveness from our Lord and He still uses us in our weaknesses.

Where has your Lord placed you in His call to you to follow Him? Do not seek to run to those places where He has not called you. Bloom where you are planted, with the fragrant blossoms of God's grace to you as sinner. Your neighboring sinners will observe and be attracted to Him who has loved them in His Son as well. His love will be heard and seen in your words and actions spoken and done in the name of your invincible Lord.

The 72 were called to go ahead of Jesus in his travels to the upcoming towns and villages. Not all of us are called to do that, but in our several callings we are promised to be used in our every weakness. All of us Christians are the laborers called to go into the harvest of our Lord. The Lord of the harvest will accomplish His purposes through us in ways we might never suspect.

To the world we will always appear as vulnerable lambs. But our invincible Lord who had been encircled by a pack of wild dogs on Mt. Calvary, would overcome many of them fifty days later changing the baring of teeth to tails wagging in eager expectation of the crumbs of life falling from His gracious table. In truth, the transition was even more miraculous. Beyond becoming domesticated dogs, those chief priests and elders became lambs of His flock, just like you. Follow Him my fellow lambs, He has called you in all your weakness to rely on His strength alone. Amen.