

Sermon Draft

Text: Luke 9:51–62

Sermon: “Rejecting, Receiving and Following”

The world talks about receiving and rejecting Jesus. Rejecting and accepting is a big part of our lives. How we choose to live and what we choose to believe, all part of our daily lives. But when it comes to receiving or rejecting Jesus, we are talking about more than just this life upon the earth.

Our Old Testament Reading occurs during the ministry of the prophet Elijah. It was without doubt the “worst of times.” Samaria was being ruled by King Ahab and Jezebel. It was a time of violence, moral depravity, and flagrant idolatry.

To avoid being killed by Ahab, Elijah escaped to Judah and was hiding in a cave, where he was brokenhearted over the unfaithfulness of the people, not to mention lonely. The Lord sent an angel to comfort Elijah, then sent Elijah to anoint Elisha. Elisha asked Elijah for permission to return home to kiss his father and mother.

Elijah granted the request, to which Elisha killed his twelve oxen for a going-away feast. By slaughtering his oxen, he indicated his commitment to follow the Lord in the prophetic office.

In our Epistle Paul writes to the churches in Galatia, to whom in an earlier chapter he expressed astonishment that they were so quickly deserting him who called them in the grace of Christ and are turning to another, distorted Gospel (Galatians 1:6–7).

Following Jesus is to walk the way of grace alone, to live in the freedom of the Gospel, which has set us free from the slavery of the law, sin, and death (5:1). Like we heard last week we are no longer prisoners in chains. This is not an excuse to ignore the law but the freedom to walk by the Spirit. It is not the works of the flesh but the fruit of the Spirit that mark the baptismal life.

In our Gospel, we heard about Jesus' unsuccessful attempt to visit a village in Samaria. He was rejected because he was journeying to Jerusalem, and the Samaritans worshiped on Mount Gerizim, not in Jerusalem.

They refused to receive Jesus, they rejected Him.

We also listened to several conversations Jesus had with his disciples and others who expressed an interest in following him.

The entire episode is shaped by the fact that Jesus is intent on reaching Jerusalem, where he will be brutally crucified to make atonement for the sins of the world.

In his Word, our crucified and risen Lord Jesus visits us today. We welcome him. We receive him and the divine gifts he desires to bestow upon us, and we will hear what it means for us to follow him. As we look at our text let us consider where today do we see rejecting, receiving and following Jesus?

Looking at ourselves and those around us, do you see many rejecting, receiving, and following Jesus? Many flat-out reject Jesus. The Samaritan village refused to receive Jesus because he was on the way to worship the Lord God at the temple in Jerusalem, not in their place of worship. The disciples wanted to destroy them (vs 51–56).

Many still today find the whole idea of Jesus and Christianity offensive. We all can think of groups, organizations, cults, governments that reject Christ and His Word because it doesn't condone their behavior or lifestyle. But we're not going to focus on them today because many sincerely desire to receive Jesus.

Not all reject the idea of faith in Christ; they're even glad to be Christians. But what does it mean **“to receive Jesus”**?

Properly, it means simply being passive, just on the receiving end of Jesus' saving work. It is by faith through grace and not by works that we are saved. But some misunderstand and think it requires a decision for Christ, a form of salvation by works. But Jesus' gifts of forgiveness, hope, and salvation are ours already. He died for the sins of the world and that in no part depended on us.

Many think they want to follow Jesus. In our text we have the three men considered following Jesus on his journey to Jerusalem and “anywhere else he would go” (vs 57, 59, 61).

Even in a society becoming more and more secular, “following Jesus” still appeals to many. It might promise help in raising our kids or a way to repair our marriages or a more successful business by honoring God’s principles. Surely it can make us feel better about how we’re living.

You know what, though? There’s a problem with all these ways of rejecting, receiving, and following Jesus, they all are looking in the wrong place, focused on the wrong person, ourselves. We see symptoms in ourselves and those around us, but if we’re really to see rejecting, receiving, and following Jesus, we must look at the face of Jesus himself (v 51).

Rejecting Jesus is really rejecting his face set to go to the cross. Jesus set his face resolutely toward Jerusalem. This is why he came, why he was sent into the world by his Father. He set out with a determination and commitment that nothing could thwart. This is the scandal that offends so many (1 Corinthians 1:18).

Saved by one so weak? A religion where a Father sends his Son to die a violent death?

Yet, because of Jesus' cross, when pastors and missionaries are rejected as Jesus was by the Samaritans, they do not respond by calling down fire from heaven, but as Jesus did. ***“God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world but that the world might be saved through him”*** (John 3:17).

Receiving Jesus is receiving his face set to go to the cross. We can't receive Jesus any other way, because no one can see the face of God and live unless God's just wrath is covered by the face of grace incarnate, the face of Jesus (John 1:14).

Today, we receive Jesus and his gifts when he comes to our “village” with his Word, Holy Baptism, and his Supper. At our Baptism, we received (totally passively!) Christ crucified, “buried with him by baptism into death” (Romans 6:4).

In Holy Communion, the body and blood of our Lord killed on the cross strengthens and preserves us in body and soul to life everlasting.

Following Jesus is following where his face is set to go: the cross. Jesus demonstrates an absolute commitment to the journey that will end in his crucifixion. The three men, on the other hand, were ignorant of the degree of commitment required and attempted to accept the divine call but with conditions (vs 57–62). Following Jesus means crosses: ***“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me”*** (Luke 9:23–24). Do you see Jesus’ face there?

Today, God’s messengers, his shepherds, his pastors, continue to be sent out into the world, to you and when they come, what face do you see? Nearly all of the primary rites for pastoral care in the Lutheran agendas end with the Aaronic Blessing: ***“The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you”*** (Numbers 6:25).

Once again the Lord has visited us. Our risen Lord Jesus has bestowed upon us his gifts of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. And at the end of today's Divine Service, he will send us home with the words of that Aaronic Blessing.

It is only because Jesus set his face resolutely and unconditionally toward Jerusalem and the cross that today he can set his face resolutely toward you as a face of unconditional grace and peace. ***“The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace”*** (Numbers 6:25–26).

In Jesus' name. Amen