

Sermon: *But*
Text: *Luke 9:51 – 62*
Date: *June 27, 2010 AM*
Place: *Jesup First UMC*

Words have a lot of power, don't they? For example, the word "*but*" can really get your attention. Now, just suppose that you're out on a date with the one you love. There's candlelight and soft music and the one you love looks into your eyes and says: "*Honey, there's no one in the world like you. I just love you ... BUT ...!*" See how that changes everything?!

Or suppose you've been expecting that stimulus check in the mail. You've already spent the money before it even gets there and then, an envelope arrives with the Seal of the United States on the front. And you tear into the envelope only to find a letter that says, "*Congress has approved a stimulus check for everyone and we thought you were eligible, BUT ...!*"

But! That three letter word changes everything. And sometimes, it isn't even spoken. Like when you tell your teenager how important it is that the entire family spend an hour or two cleaning the house and then, she comes to you 15 minutes later and asks to go to the library. Now, friends, she didn't say it, but what she really meant was: "*Daddy, I know you think cleaning the house is important, BUT ...!*"

Now, you and I would like to think that everybody followed Jesus, that when Jesus walked into town people fell at His feet and accepted Him and welcomed Him into their city, their homes, and their hearts. But in our text this morning, Luke tells us about a village in Samaria that rejected Jesus. And the disciples were so upset that they wanted to call

down fire on them. Then, Luke goes on to tell us about three men – we don't even know their names – who didn't respond. Jesus said to one: "*Follow me,*" and the man said: "*Okay, I'd love to follow you, BUT first let me go and bury my father.*" Then, He said to another: "*Follow me,*" and the man said: "*I will follow you, BUT first let me go say goodbye to my family.*"

Now, this text is obviously about our call to discipleship. You see, that's what we are. Before the followers of Jesus were called "Christians," they were called "disciples," students, those who learn the teachings and the lifestyle of another and seek to live their lives accordingly. And so, here is a call to discipleship and the very first thing we need to do this morning is to explore a little deeper the realities of this call.

THE FIRST THING I NOTICE ABOUT THIS CALL IS: THE COSTS ARE HIGH. It's gonna cost us something. Jesus said: "*Foxes have holes and birds ... have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.*" We're not called to a prosperity gospel. This isn't a "*name it and claim it*" Christianity. From the very beginning, Jesus says: "*If you follow me, you'll have to make sacrifices.*"

You're probably not going to see your picture in the paper with a caption that reads: "Christian of the Year." And if you truly live out the teachings of Christ, you may not be the most popular person in town. Listen, our brothers and sisters in the Middle East are being run out of their homes by Muslim extremists. Our brothers and sisters in China are being jailed and

persecuted. Our brothers and sisters in the Sudan are being murdered for their faith! The costs are high!

THE SECOND THING I NOTICE ABOUT THIS CALL IS: THE TIME IS NOW! In verse 59, a potential disciple says: *“Hey, I’d like to follow you, but first let me go and bury my daddy,”* and Jesus responds: *“Let the dead bury the dead, you come and follow me.”* You know, the interesting thing about this text is that we immediately sympathize with the man, we’ve all lost someone special and had our lives turned upside down with grief and pain. But look again: there’s nothing in this text that indicates the man’s father had already died. In fact, most scholars believe the man was putting off following Jesus until his father died at some unknown time in the future, but Jesus said: *“You can’t put it off, come and follow me.”*

A few years ago, in one of my churches, we were doing our annual Stewardship Campaign where we asked the members of the church to make a commitment of their time, talent, and treasures to God through the church. And that’s when Tim came to see me. He said: *“Preacher, I just want you to know that I didn’t volunteer to serve anywhere in the church. I’m going to wait until I retire, then I’ll have more time.”* Well, it just so happened that Tim retired from teaching a few years later, but when he turned in his Commitment Card that year, he still didn’t volunteer to serve anywhere. So, I asked him about it and he said: *“Oh Preacher, I’ve got a lot to do around the house, but on I get everything squared away, then I’ll serve.”* Well, a few more years went by and I saw a man from

that church at Annual Conference and I asked about Tim and he said: *“Oh, you didn’t hear about Tim? He was putting a new roof on his shed and had a heart attack. He didn’t make it.”* And I thought: *“How sad! A man with the skills and the knowledge and the personality to make the church a better place, but he just never got around to it.”*

There are a lot of people who are waiting for the perfect time. They’re waiting until they get older, or until they retire, or until they have the energy, or until everything at home is in order ... before they will commit themselves to fully following Jesus. But friends, you can’t put it off until tomorrow ... the time is now!

THE THIRD THING I NOTICE ABOUT THIS CALL IS: THE WAY IS FORWARD. Jesus said: **“No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God.”** Everybody listening to Jesus that day would have understood what He was talking about. Plowing is a forward-looking task. You have to keep your eyes on where you are and where you’re going and stop worrying about where you’ve been or you’ll go off course and never get where you need to go.

Jesus said that’s what discipleship is like. Following Jesus requires that we keep our eyes on where we are and where God is leading us. Now, the temptation is to reminisce about the good ole days and the way things use to be, and to allow that to keep the church stagnated. But Jesus is calling us forward. This morning, we need to take a long, hard, and fresh look at where we are as a church in our

discipleship and where God is leading us. That needs to be our goal and we need to set our eyes on that goal and move toward it. Friends, we can't go anywhere that God isn't! We can't do anything that God hasn't empowered us to do. The way to better ... the way to true discipleship and healthy church life ... is forward.

You know, we all want to follow Jesus. We all want to walk in the path of true discipleship, but ... there's that three letter word B.U.T. ... But the costs are too high ... But the timing just never feels right ... But we're sometimes for concerned about the past than the future.

Maxie Dunham tells the story of William Borden, the heir of the Borden Dairy fortune. In 1904, he graduated from high school as a millionaire and for a graduation present, his parents sent him on a trip around the world. Along the way, William was burdened by the reality of human suffering and decided to become a missionary. That night, he opened his bible and wrote two words on the inside of the back cover ... "No reserves." A few years later, he graduated from Yale and headed off to seminary and that night, he opened his bible and wrote two words underneath the first two: "No retreats."

Well, William graduated from Princeton Seminary and sailed for China where he was to serve as a missionary and on the way, he stopped in Egypt. While he was in Egypt, he was stricken with meningitis of the brain and died within a month, never making it to his destination. But a few days before he

died, he opened the back cover of his bible and wrote two more words there: “No regrets.”¹

You know what I’ve discovered, brothers and sisters? The only way to truly live life with no regrets is to live with no reserves and no retreats. To live all out, full steam ahead with no chance of ever going back. Some wanted to follow, but it cost too much. Some wanted to follow, but the timing wasn’t right. Some wanted to follow, but they kept looking back.

What about you? Joshua said: “*See, I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse, ... choose you this day whom you will serve ... but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*”

*I have decided to follow Jesus. I have decided to follow Jesus.
I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back.*

*Though none go with me, still I will follow. Though none go with me,
still I will follow. Though none go with me, still I will follow,
no turning back, no turning back.*

¹ Maxie Dunham: No Reserves, No Retreats, No Regrets