

The disciples lead off the Gospel today as we hear them commenting to Jesus how *they* are following him, but the Samaritans are not—“should we rain down fire from heaven on them,” they ask? Jesus is not happy with them.

How many times do we judge the strength and worth of another’s commitment to Jesus? We focus on how *another* person fails, but we completely ignore how *we* are doing. Jesus says—turn 180 degrees and instead of examining others, we should examine ourselves.

We then hear about Jesus encountering three types of people: one who says he’ll follow Jesus anywhere, one who puts off a commitment until it’s convenient and one who will do it only when he can control the outcome.

So let’s do as Jesus suggests, and ask ourselves: what are we attached to today that keeps us from following Jesus fully and freely?

Will Willimon is an American theologian and a Professor of the Practice of Christian Ministry at Duke Divinity School. He tells the story of a parent of a University of North Carolina student who called Rev Willimon after their daughter took some courses with him. They were absolutely livid with him.

“Our daughter,” they said, “has always wanted to be a research scientist, but now she wants to be a medical missionary. You have ruined her life! Why did you do that to her?” Not all will be called to give up their comfortable life, but some will.

If following Jesus cost you a safe life, would you do it?

“Juliette Morgan was a woman of wealth, status, education and connections. She was an aristocrat of Montgomery, Alabama society in the 1950’s. Morgan suffered, however from anxiety attacks. These attacks prevented her from driving her own car so, to get to work, she rode the city buses in Montgomery. On those buses, she saw white bus drivers threaten and humiliate black men and women who paid the same 10-cent fare she paid.

Morgan began writing letters to the city's local newspaper, denouncing the injustices she witnessed. She wrote that segregation was un-Christian and wrong. The response was immediate: Morgan lost her job at a local bookstore.

One morning as she rode the bus to town to search for a job, Morgan watched a black woman pay her fare and then leave the front door of the bus to re-enter through the back door, as was the custom in Alabama. As soon as the black woman stepped off the bus, the white bus driver pulled away, leaving the woman behind even though she'd already paid her fare. Incensed, Morgan jumped up and pulled the emergency cord. She demanded the bus driver open the door and let the black woman come on board. No one on the bus, black or white, could believe what they were seeing. In the days that followed, Morgan pulled the emergency cord every time she witnessed such injustices.

News spread quickly, and bus drivers began to bait Morgan, angering her so she would get off the bus and walk the rest of the way to her destination, sometimes a mile or more. Morgan was finally hired at the Carnegie Library and her life remained uneventful for a time.

On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a Montgomery city bus. On December 12, 1955, Morgan wrote the following "letter to the editor" published in the *Montgomery Advertiser*: "The Negroes of Montgomery seem to have taken a lesson from Gandhi. Their own task is greater than Gandhi's however, for they have greater prejudice to overcome." As she continued writing to the papers, Morgan began to receive threatening letters and was bombarded by obscene phone calls and hate mail. White people boycotted the library where she worked. They called her an extremist. Teenage boys taunted and humiliated her in public and in front of her staff at the library. A cross was burned in her front yard. Some of Morgan's friends said she was mentally ill and demanded she be fired. Morgan's personal campaign against racism and injustice eventually caused her to become estranged from friends, former students, colleagues, neighbors and even her own mother.

If following Jesus meant you'd lose your job, or lose your privileged place in society, would you do it?

This week, at the Border Patrol's Central Processing Center in McAllen, Texas, lawyers were sent to check out the conditions in the facilities where people legally seeking asylum were being held. They encountered a 17-year-old mother from Guatemala who couldn't stand because of complications from an emergency C-section, and who was caring for a sick and dirty premature baby.

The baby girl and her mom, were both filthy. The people running the facility wouldn't give the mother any water to wash herself or her baby. One of the lawyers took a Kleenex and washed around the mother's neck and found caked on black dirt.

After government lawyers argued in San Francisco this week that amenities such as soap and toothbrushes should not be mandated under the legal settlement originally agreed to between the government and migrant families in 1997, all three judges voiced dismay.

Among the guidelines set under that legal settlement are that facilities for children must be "safe and sanitary." We are failing not only the law of the land at our borders, but more importantly—by our silence we are advocating the cruelty that is happening to these children. This is not a political issue. It's an issue of compassion.

We are followers of Jesus. We have pledged to follow him and to respect the dignity of every human being and see the face of Christ in all. But are we living that out? Are we even speaking out about it?

If following Jesus means others might think less of us when we speak out about loving our neighbor, will we still do it?

You know--- I love you all, but let's be honest-- there are times when following Jesus is just *hard*- and we can rationalize why we don't, and we can make up excuses when it's too hard- just like the people in the gospel today. Oh, we'd like to think we're like that person who said they'd follow

Jesus anywhere- but as Jesus explains- following him isn't just to get to a destination. Following him is forever a journey- no time to stop and say you've had enough, no place where you'll always be safe and secure- no place to lay our heads --until **everyone** has a place to lay their heads.

Jesus wants us to know that this “loving” thing- it's not something we put down when we get tired of plowing that field, and it's not something we can do while sneaking looks at the other way. Because that's when we get derailed.

But one thing I can tell you- whenever the plowing in the field of love gets difficult- Jesus will be right there by your side to help you plow it.
Amen.