

Third Sunday after Pentecost – 2025

1 Kings 19:9b-21

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

Luke 9:51-62

How many of y'all like your pillow? In a pillow, we all want the perfect balance of height, fluffiness, and firmness to support our head and relax our neck. Some folks like their pillow so much that they take it with them when they travel. We all get used to our pillows – a soft, familiar place to lay our head. “Remember Lot’s wife” (Luke 17:32). Jesus said that. Lot and his family were told by the angels to get out of Dodge – Dodge being the town of Sodom. The Lord had announced: “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is very great and their sin is grave” (Genesis 18:20). Abraham interceded, begging God not to sweep away the righteous with the wicked. But there *were no* righteous there, except Lot and his family, and the angels ensured that they were taken out of the city before it was decimated. “Escape for your life. Do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley. Escape to the hills, lest you be swept away” (Genesis 19:17). A divine tempest of fire and sulfur engulfed those unholy dens. Something pulled at Lot’s wife. Was she reluctant to leave her possessions, her pillow, the place where she had laid her head? Something pulled at her. You would be unwise to dismiss the idea that something worldly might pull at you. If you were called to leave everything, would you be tempted to look back? Lot’s wife; remember Lot’s wife. She looked back. She was turned into a pillar of salt (Genesis 19:26).

Is there anything above the First Commandment? Is your allegiance to your pillow (or anything else) above the First Commandment? You shall have no other gods. What does this mean? We should fear, love and trust in God above all things. What, in your life, is teaching you the expansiveness, the magnificence of this commandment? What, in your life, is helping you to fear, love, and trust in God above all things? Some unnamed individual said to our Lord: “I will follow you wherever you go” (Luke 9:57). It is a beautiful statement. If you were rewriting this scene, if you were going to put some snappy reply in the Lord’s mouth, what would it be? “Right on, dude. Jump on the train! We’re headed to the Decapolis, and then to Bethany and then to Jerusalem. The more the merrier.” I have no doubt about the sincerity of the person who said it; “I will follow you wherever you go.” In reply, the Lord chose to say this: “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Luke 9:58). It was as if He said, “I have no pillow here, bro. I’m not making this place my home. I have no place to lay my head except a cross outside of Jerusalem and I’m not looking back.”

One of our hymns has this priceless stanza:

In life no house, no home – My Lord on earth might have;

In death no friendly tomb – But what a stranger gave.

What may I say? Heav’n was His home – But mine the tomb Wherein He lay.

(My Song is Love Unknown – Lutheran Service Book 430, st. 6)

Is there any question that the Lord of heaven and earth has called you to follow Him? That is what a baptized believer is, a follower of Christ, a disciple of Christ, a human being who has been set apart for a holy purpose. You have been given a life that is anchored in heaven. You follow our Lord, forward, toward the place that He leads. There is much that is behind us. What

is profane is behind us. What is selfish and vain and empty and corrupt and old and worldly and tired is behind us. Greed and lust and vengeance is behind us – why look back? Covetousness and self-pity and deceit and making excuses for our sin and spiritual sloth is behind us – why look back? But we do. No one is exempt from this accusation. We look back. The kingdom of God is in front of us and we look behind. Here's a blistering statement: "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). Do you know why that statement is blistering? Because it's me. It's blistering because it's true and it's me.

St. Luke is keen to tell us that Jesus set His face toward Jerusalem. "When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51). What was at Jerusalem? Jesus' death was at Jerusalem (Crucify, crucify him). What was at Jerusalem? The First Commandment was at Jerusalem (Your will, not mine be done). Only Jesus is fit for the kingdom of God – and those who are in Jesus. Wyatt Robert was baptized *into* Christ (Romans 6:3). Buried with Christ, Wyatt was raised a new creation – the old has gone, behold, the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17). We are fit for the kingdom of God because Christ's blood has washed us, sanctified us (Ephesians 5:26-27). We are fit for the kingdom of God because Jesus kept the First Commandment and His righteousness has been attributed to you, by grace, through faith (Romans 3:21-24). Believe me, I want to put my hand to the plow and look only forward, only toward the Lord and His cross, only toward the Lord and His means of grace, only toward the Lord and His church. I firmly believe that you are like me. But I'm far too much like Lot's wife. A single hairbreadth like Lot's wife is too much like her. What's going to empower me, empower you to live as one who follows Christ heart and soul?

It's a beautiful twist, a Gospel irony, but the kingdom of God pulls at *us*. God Himself pulls at *us*. Over and over, we put our hand to the plow and move our lives forward, following Christ. Why? Because heaven is compelling. Light is compelling. Truth and love and grace are compelling, and our Lord invades our hearts and minds and we delight to put our hand to the plow as His people. We eat His body and His love compels us to serve our neighbor (John 13:12-15, 34-35). We put our hand to the plow. We drink His blood and His forgiveness compels us to forgive as we have been forgiven (Colossians 3:13). We put our hand to the plow and leave our pillow behind. We receive Christ's absolution, the kingdom of God pulls at us, and so we speak of Christ's love to others (1 Peter 2:9). The First Commandment is our joy because the kingdom of God pulls at us. To be where Christ is, to be in this Divine Service receiving the fruit of His death and resurrection is the First Commandment in action. And here you are! We are made fit for the kingdom of God.

Where will Christ lead us? What is in store for each of us as we follow our Good Shepherd? St. Paul wrote this: "forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13-14). Beautiful! Put your hand to the plow and echo the words of discipleship, "I will follow you wherever you go" (Luke 9:57).