

<sup>51</sup>As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. <sup>52</sup>And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; <sup>53</sup>but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. <sup>54</sup>When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" <sup>55</sup>But Jesus turned and rebuked them. <sup>56</sup>Then he and his disciples went to another village.

<sup>57</sup>As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go."

<sup>58</sup>Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."

<sup>59</sup>He said to another man, "Follow me." But he replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."

<sup>60</sup>Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

<sup>61</sup>Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family."

<sup>62</sup>Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

### **On the Road...**

I sometimes think it was quite hard of Jesus to pick his disciples knowing that their lives would mostly end in violence as well as his. The disciples really did give up everything to follow Jesus, but they would have argued instead that in Jesus they had found everything, and though fear made them wobble over Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, they then became extraordinarily stalwart, living the kingdom of God to the full, without hesitation.

On the road in this passage, someone sees this happy band of followers and, caught in the zeitgeist of the Jesus peace revolution, promises to follow Jesus wherever. Jesus's response is not unfriendly, but realistic. 'It's not all peace and love you know,' he might have said. 'There's going to be hardship, and conflict too, you know.'

The next two are sort of ready to follow — but there is unfinished business for them. Essentially, they think following Jesus is *quite* important, but they have allowed other things to be more important to them at that moment. Jesus's replies — 'let the dead bury their own dead', 'no one who puts their hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God' sound extraordinarily harsh. Most commentators believe that the first is not recently bereaved, but rather deferring any active discipleship until after his parents have died. His spirit is perhaps in line with what Augustine (satirically) reports himself to have prayed in his youth "Give me chastity and continence, but not yet!"

For us, Jesus simply reminds us that the best path is not the easiest path, but it is still the best — and in its way easier than the easy path! Just as long as we accept that faith is a walk with God, during which there are tired legs, tough hills and blisters, but also a tremendous amount of amazing views and real distance travelled, and the most worthwhile thing of all.

In all of this, Jesus, in exhorting steadfastness, embodies it himself. At the beginning of the passage Luke reports that Jesus, knowing the time was approaching, resolutely set out for Jerusalem. He had been doing good work in Galilee — it would have been so easy to procrastinate, especially when he knew very well the nature of what was coming — but no, it was right to turn towards Jerusalem. So he did.