



SIEBENQUELL

Reflection on Luke 9, 57-62

The Challenge of the Plow



SOURCE: ROSEMARIE MONNERJAHN 2014

»As they were going along the road, someone said to him, »I will follow you wherever you go.«
And Jesus said to him, »Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.«

To another he said, »Follow me.«

But he said, »Lord, first let me go and bury my father.«

But Jesus said to him, »Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.«

Another said, »I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home.«

Jesus said to him, »No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.«

These are tough words. »Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.« But behind this toughness, there lurks a deep and abiding concern of Jesus. He is fearful of what will happen to his brothers and sisters, if they start out strong, but do not know how to cross the finish line.

»No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.« The image is not all that hard to understand. To place your hand upon the plow is to announce your clear intention. By doing this, a person is saying, that they are going to head out to plow a field. It is the announcement of the intention to set out and perform a work in which good earth is prepared for seed, growth and fruitfulness.

So where does the problem lie? Simple! It is impossible to properly and cleanly plow a field while looking backwards. The furrows will be crooked, running every which way through the field. And that makes them utterly useless. On the one hand, a part of the labour and work has been done, but on the other hand, the work was all for naught. It was done in such a way, that it is of no use to anyone. Earth is torn up and moved, but afterwards the soil is not in any condition to take up the seed of the sowing.

Herein lays the first challenge of the plow and, at the same time, the problem of the plow. It is easy to announce our intention, but all the real struggle is delivering on the promise. At the turn of every New Year we make resolutions to eat less, exercise more, stop smoking, start new projects and change for the better. All of us have tales to tell of how long and how well we kept these resolutions.

Vincent Pallotti places the problem of the plow before us in our religious lives. I have no doubt that we really mean it when we announce our intention to proclaim the Gospel, rekindle love, and multiply faith. There are clear and upright moments in life when we place our hand upon the plow. Yet deeply attuned to Jesus, Pallotti knows the danger of these moments. »No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.«

This does not mean that we need to despair and throw up our hands in resignation. Instead, this is the moment when we need to ask ourselves what we truly love. If we love being followers of Jesus, then we will face the challenge head on. But if we are not truly committed, then we will use our failures as the perfect excuse to pack our bags and go home. This is the moment when we need to ask ourselves what is worth struggling for in our lives. And if following Jesus is worth struggling for, then we will need to face head on the curse that lies heavy upon our intention to live like disciples, the curse of the rear view mirror. But that is a tale for the next time.

Erik Riechers SAC

January 19, 2015, Vallendar