

Luke 9: 51 – end

‘Prevaricating’

Introduction ...

Are you someone who prevaricates or procrastinates? You know that something needs doing ... but somehow you never get around to it ...

Here’s a short poem:

Procrastination is my sin

It brings me naught but sorrow

I know that I should stop it

In fact – I will – tomorrow!

It might be a lifetime habit, including such things as:

- Never quite focusing down on the revision you meant to do at school or college: you might make up a lovely timetable ... but that’s about it
- Sorting out that pile of stuff or room or cupboard at home
- Organising that meeting at work that you know will be difficult
- Sending a card of thanks or condolence

If you use a search engine you can find wonderful web pages such as *‘23 great excuses to avoid doing anything important’*, or *‘19 excuses that are keeping you stuck.’* Many of the suggestions will be familiar to us: *‘I don’t have time’*; *‘I am not qualified’*; *‘I don’t have the right equipment.’* Some are just weird – for example: *‘I have to give the hamster a good washing’*; or *‘I don’t go out on days that end with the letters ‘d’ ‘a’ and ‘y’!* Excuses can be great to use, but they are not so great if you are on the receiving end. We may enjoy putting things off, but we don’t enjoy it when other people delay doing what we want done ... now.

In today’s Gospel, we read of two people making excuses to Jesus. One says he has to go and bury his father, while another wants to say his farewells to family and friends. Were they excuses or were they reasons? It may be that, in the particular circumstances of each case, Jesus knew that they were being unreasonable and that what they presented as an acceptable reason was actually simply a delaying tactic.

Priorities ...

It helps if we understand Jesus’ urgency as being motivated by the need for prioritisation. I think I’ve mentioned before a grid of four boxes about what is urgent and what is important:

One square is for things that are neither important or urgent – these things might be interesting, attractive – and can distract us from the other boxes. Looking in holiday brochures or online holiday sites when we’ve no intention of taking a holiday ...

Another square is for things that are urgent but not important ... again the urgency can blind us to the fact that they’re not important – yes – that offer might end tonight ... but do we really want or need to take it up anyway? **PTO**

Another square is for things that are important but not urgent ... and the lack of urgency may lead us to think “well, I won’t bother with it now”. Perhaps filling in your tax form at this time of year???

The 4th square is for things that are both urgent and important. This is where Jesus locates his call to follow him – urgent and important. Following Jesus is presented as an absolute priority. It is too important to be put off. As a priority it demands a sense of urgency and a sense of focus.

Jesus’ response in today’s Gospel is quick and clear. He will take no excuses. He appears to be saying **‘Follow me now or not at all.’** Sometimes an excuse conceals the truth about what we really feel – that is **‘I will do this when I have nothing better to do’** or **‘I am going to put this at or near the bottom of my to do list.’** But if we have had a nudge from the Holy Spirit to call in on someone, to make sure that something is in place ... it may be – for whatever reason – that if we prevaricate – the opportunity to serve God in that situation has disappeared. An anonymous saying: **The devil doesn’t mind how much good we do – as long as we don’t do it today!**

Jesus encourages his listeners to look to the future, to the kingdom that is to come rather than the past as represented by the dead or those who are being left behind. If the person ploughing does not focus on looking ahead, they are not concentrating and being a follower of Jesus requires total concentration.

This is both challenging and demanding but it is not achieved on our own. In **Galatians (5:16)** Paul teaches that we **‘live by the Spirit.’** This is both a command and a promise. If we live by the Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit will be evident in our lives. This not only encourages and enriches our lives, it also enables us to be faithful disciples who live in the present and look to the future. This relationship in the Spirit is achieved by following Jesus as a life priority with no excuses. In doing so, we are set free and the Spirit will guide and shape our discipleship.

Adapted from [Explore and respond \(rootsontheweb.com\)](https://www.rootsontheweb.com)