

I. Introduction (*Introduce self*)

A. Welcome back to our series on following a subversive Savior. Today the subversive activity of Jesus is "Having Not"

1. When I first thought of preaching on this theme, the quick voice inside me said, "Sure, I know about 'Having not'. These days ...
 - a) I don't have the freedom to go out to eat at any restaurant I want
 - b) I don't have cozy casual gatherings with good friends sitting anywhere we choose inside or out
 - c) I don't have live worship services to attend in the company of the people of God whom I miss
2. I'll bet for most of you watching now in this global pandemic, **it's not hard for you also to identify personally with "Having not"** You can probably add other "I don't have ..." statements, like ...
 - a) I don't have the chance to get out of the house much because I have to work from home
 - b) I don't have peace of mind anymore about my children's health when I send them off to school because I don't know who may be infectious there
 - c) Some of you may even be saying "I don't have a job because of COVID!"

B. At all of these practical levels, we all know "I don't have"

II. AND YET, as much as we all miss things we used to have, today's subversion from Jesus may be the hardest one of all

A. Why do I say that?

1. Because I think I know my audience here at Waterford
 - a) On the whole and compared to most of the world, we the people of WMC are not really suffering
 - b) Now by that I'm not saying that nobody here has felt pain, financial loss, isolation or declines in physical and mental health due to COVID
 - c) We pastors are aware of some deep struggles that many of you are still feeling ... losses that are real and we cannot pretend otherwise.
2. But I also realize how predominantly white we at Waterford are, making us almost 5 times less likely than people of color to be hospitalized for COVID-19

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/hospitalization-death-by-race-ethnicity.html>

- a) And as a pastor I realize that, based on personal feedback from church members and on our surprisingly resilient financial giving despite an economic depression, most of Waterford people have not been hit really hard by COVID-19, either financially or health-wise

b) In fact I know that at least a few of you, when you hear the alarming COVID news stories, have admitted to feeling guilty about how little it has disrupted your life

B. So I believe the subversive "having not" activity of Jesus is very challenging for most of us.

1. From my perception of our overall COVID status in this church, we're getting through this crisis better than many others. This is not because we're lucky ... it's because we're privileged!

a) On one hand, it's true that many of us made some deliberate choices in recent months in order to reduce our exposure to the coronavirus

b) But most of us have been in the position to make those choices

because we're white ... or our community was blessed with high quality schools ...

or we had access to funding to go to college ... or we don't have to work in a field that's considered "essential"

c) The very ability to make risk-reduction choices for ourselves or our families ... makes us privileged

2. This subversive example of Jesus is inherently countercultural for those of us who've grown up in the US or Canada. All our lives, everywhere around us, we have been constantly flooded with ads and messages proclaiming that more is always better

III. With that prologue to a difficult passage about Jesus, let's dig a little deeper into the context from 2000 years ago

A. In this section of Luke chapter 9 we hear briefly about 3 interactions that Jesus has with people he meets who are willing to follow him

1. Interestingly, this story takes place immediately after the Luke 9 text that Pastor Cindy preached from 2 weeks ago, where Jesus rebukes His disciples for their violent impulses

a) In that story, Jesus is presented as following in the mold of the great prophet Elijah. As we'll see today, that pattern shows up again.

b) After He and His disciples leave that inhospitable Samaritan village, they go to another village

c) Along the way, Jesus encounters 3 different men and he engages with them about joining His entourage and following Him

2. Let's review what happens in the first 2 encounters, before we examine the 3rd one, which deserves special attention

B. The 1st interaction has someone coming up to him, eagerly saying "I will follow you anywhere!"

1. The response of Jesus about having less of a home than birds and foxes is basically telling us that Jesus is homeless ...
2. This response of Jesus is typical of so many times when He does not give a straightforward answer but instead says something cryptic
3. What a strange response to someone who is excited to join your team!! What I hear Jesus saying to that enthusiastic man is THIS:
 - a) “If you follow me, my homelessness will be your homelessness” OR
 - b) Simply put: “This will be harder than you think”

C. The 2nd interaction doesn’t have someone coming to Jesus

1. This time Jesus leads off, when he sees a different man on the road and he puts out an invitation – “Follow me”
 - a) The man’s response is affirmative but not very enthusiastic – “First let me go and bury my father” he says
 - b) And in typical Jesus fashion, the rabbi sounds to our ears rather opaque, even harsh when he says “Let the dead bury their own dead”
 - c) But then, to clarify things a little, Jesus adds this kicker – “But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God”
2. The man did not refuse Jesus, he just added a condition which would have been quite reasonable among 1st Century Jews.
 - a) As one commentator put it, “... the burial of a father was a religious duty of the utmost importance. To leave it undone was something scandalous to a Jew.” (I. Howard Marshall, Luke, New Int’l Greek Testament Commentary, p. 411)
 - b) Another commentator gave this paraphrase of what Jesus said to the 2nd man: “Let those who are dead to the kingdom of God take care of themselves – YOU take care of the kingdom.”
(David L. Jeffrey, Luke, Brazos Theological Commentary, p. 144)
3. What Jesus is doing emphatically here is calling for His followers to be spiritually alive people!

IV. And then we come to the 3rd interaction of Jesus

A. Here a man tells Jesus, “I’ll follow you, after I say goodbye to my family”

1. This sounds very reasonable, don’t you think? After all, bidding farewell to those back home is honorable and respectful
2. But Jesus, once again giving a mysterious answer, says that any plowman who looks back isn’t fit for God’s kingdom!
3. OK Jesus, what does a plow have to do with this?

B. As so often happens, there’s more to Jesus’ words than what meets the ear, so let’s unpack this a bit ...

1. This story follows right after the one that Pastor Cindy preached on 2 weeks ago. But there’s another parallel today from that sermon of hers, and it has to do with the Prophet Elijah

a) This plow reference of Jesus makes much more sense after we have heard the story from 1 Kings 19 about Elijah and Elisha.

Just to refresh our memories, after fleeing for his life, Elijah is instructed by God to get up and go anoint Elisha as his successor

So Elijah meets Elisha out in a field, where he’s supervising 12 men plowing with 12 yoke of oxen

Wordlessly Elijah passes along his authority as Yahweh’s prophet by placing his mantle (his shawl) around the shoulders of Elisha

(a) In other words, the master is calling a new disciple for God’s work. Does that sound familiar from Luke 9?

(b) Then Elijah walks away

b) So this foreman for a crew of plowmen decides to leave his responsibilities and run after the famous prophet

Elisha accepts this new calling but he wants to first go back home and kiss his mother and father goodbye. Hmm, didn’t we just hear something like that, from a scene almost 900 years later?

And kind of like Jesus did later, Elijah has a puzzling response to this request, but I won’t take the time to explain all of that.

The long and the short of it is that Elisha does go back home to say goodbye.

(a) But while he is there, he slaughters the 2 oxen he was plowing with, and he burns up the wooden yoke, probably to make the fire to cook all that meat for the neighbors

(b) What’s going on here?? Elisha is destroying his own means of making a living ... he’s making a clean break with his past before stepping into his new calling

2. The gist of this 3rd interaction Jesus has with a potential disciple is this: Jesus calls for complete commitment, even the willingness to turn your back on your family and your job!

V. Boy does this raise questions for Jesus’ disciples today!

A. Questions such as ...

1. If this subversive action of Jesus is “having not”, what exactly is that “not”? ie. What does Jesus make a point of not having?

2. Is Jesus asking us to give away all our “stuff” and become poor & homeless?

3. More importantly, what might “having not” look like today? What are some 21st C implications for followers of this subversive Savior?

B. For what it's worth, here are 3 possible answers to that last question about what it might mean today ... and all 3 have to do with comfort [PPT 3 comforts 1]

1. The first answer is easy and obvious: Our 1st "have not" is an outwardly comfortable life

- a) A very surface level view would say this is referring to a home, or a place of shelter to come back to, since Jesus was apparently homeless
- b) But I think this outwardly comfy life that we're to "have not" represents much more than just lack of housing:

This has to do with "stuff" ... it's about the creature comforts that we all enjoy so much

It mostly centers around our material world and our attachments to it: food, shelter, cash, investments, mobility, insurance policies ...

Really, it's about stability, being isolated from danger ... about security in the sense of always having enough

- c) An outwardly comfortable life is a life with no big physical stresses to deal with. It is a cushy life, one that Jesus did not have day in and day out, and we His followers dare not feel entitled to more than that.

2. There is a second possible implication for us today of "having not", a possibility that runs deeper: [PPT 3 comforts 2] An inwardly comfortable life

- a) If the first kind of life was all about comfort of the body and the sensory world around us, this life is about comfort of the mind

- b) Examples of the inwardly comfy life include

Living in an uncomplicated world, where everything is simple and pretty much black and white

Having a stable life situation, with no big crises

A casual spirituality based on casual commitments

- c) The inwardly comfortable life is one with no big emotional or psychic stresses. Yet Jesus was not spared the stresses of betrayal and anguish.
- d) This subversive Savior challenges how strongly we cling to the dream of peace of mind ... and even the expectation that we deserve such a life

3. The third possible way that following Jesus could play out for us today is in "having not ..." A socially comfortable life [PPT 3 comforts 3]

- a) This is all about our relationships
- b) I would say that almost all of us here instinctively recognize what a socially comfortable life is, because WE work hard to preserve it for ourselves. In such a life, we ...

Find solidarity with people who look like us, talk like us, think like us, or live as we live

Associate with groups where membership is easy & unchallenging
Spend as little time as possible around anyone we wouldn't want to relax or drink tea with

c) A well-known proverb says, “*Birds of a feather flock together*” yet Jesus broke that rule.

Jesus didn't operate in an echo chamber populated only with people who agreed with him

Instead, he hung out with fishermen, tax collectors and “sinners”

d) When it comes to “having not” a socially comfortable life, we today struggle big-time with believing another old proverb: “*What's good for the goose (meaning Jesus) is good for the gander (meaning His disciples)*”

VI. So let me bring it home

A. Friends I realize this is tough stuff! There are reasons why Jesus was considered subversive!

1. First let me clarify some mistaken conclusions I'm not pushing:

a) This passage is not saying “If you want to follow Jesus, you have to be homeless, paralyzed by anxiety, and cut off from friends and family”

b) The real measure of “having not” lies in the brutally honest work that you do, by the Holy Spirit's help, to examine whether these comforts are no longer serving you but whether you are serving them

2. It's not sheer sacrifice God is after.

a) God does not gleefully relish our deprivation

b) Rather God desires our willingness ...

to consider making the sacrifice

to lift the fences we've erected around those comfort idols

to renew a whole-hearted commitment to God through Jesus Christ

B. Having said all that, Jesus does invite us to live into His teachings, not to just hear them and immediately go back to our comfortable lives

1. If we only talk about the danger of possessing but never actually do anything about it, that more than anything else, reveals the godlike power that “having” exerts over us

2. This is not a “how to” sermon, but I know that many of you are drawn more to the world of action than of words.

So I'll leave you with 3 simple actions in support of “having not”

a) [PPT 3 actions 1] Try a *fasting experiment*. I challenge you to take just one day this week and refrain from doing something that normally occupies large parts of your mind and energy:

Could be food ... social media ... news content ... all non-work internet usage .

The point is not to say that you did it. The point is to examine how your day went and your own thought patterns when you didn't have that comfort occupying so much of your head

b) 2nd, if your biggest struggle is “having not” an inwardly comfortable life, because you obsess all day over some fear or anger or other emotion, try a prayer technique called *the Welcoming Prayer*. [PPT 3 actions 2]

It can be a bit disarming at first, but I have found it very helpful.

Once this sermon is posted on our website, it will contain a web link of introduction to this prayer, but you can also just Google “welcoming prayer” if you're curious about it

[https://contemplativeadventure.wordpress.com/prayer-ideas/welcoming-prayer/#:~:text=Cynthia%20Bourgeault\)%3A%20There%20are,3\)%20Let%20go.&text=1\)%20FOCUS%20AND%20SINK%20I N.,-This%20is%20not](https://contemplativeadventure.wordpress.com/prayer-ideas/welcoming-prayer/#:~:text=Cynthia%20Bourgeault)%3A%20There%20are,3)%20Let%20go.&text=1)%20FOCUS%20AND%20SINK%20I N.,-This%20is%20not)

c) Finally, I invite you to just read some other *different teachings of our Lord Jesus*, if this one today feels too much of a downer. [PPT 3 actions 3]
Jesus also said some very hopeful and reassuring things, such as

Luke 18:22-30 “*what is impossible with people is possible with God*”

Matthew 11:28-30 “*My yoke is easy and my burden is light*”

John 10:10 “*that they may have life and have it to the full*”

**C. Take with you this closing word of hope from Apostle Paul:
*Romans 15:13***