

# “Jesus and RSVP’s”

Luke 9:51-62

First Presbyterian Church, Champaign, IL  
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I’m not very good at RSVP’s.

The phrase comes with formal invitations to things like weddings, graduations, or formal functions. It means, please respond. It is from the French, *répondez s’il vous plait*. RSVP. Merriam Webster tells me the abbreviation came into common usage in 1953.

The reason I’m not very good at responding to RSVP’s is that you have to be committed. “Yes” means that when that wedding day rolls around, I’m going to be there. “Yes” means I’ll be there even if something better has come up. “Yes” means I’ll be there even if it is not convenient for me to attend on that day. “Yes” means I’m committed. “Yes” means I’m making a promise. That single “yes” changes the trajectory of my whole life.

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You can see where this is going. Jesus is asking us to follow. Saying “yes” to Jesus requires a big change.

Jesus is inviting people to follow. He’s inviting them to say “yes.” But there are costs involved. He’s asking us to measure the cost. Don’t say “yes” thoughtlessly. If you’re going to follow the rabbi Jesus, your life will conform to his life, his way, his example. Are you sure that you want to say “yes” to the changes that Jesus might have in mind?

Jesus says, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." *If you follow me, you may find yourself in my shoes. Following me may mean a certain kind of homelessness. You might find yourself sleeping in a hammock on a scorching night in a village in Honduras on a mission trip with a bunch of Episcopalians helping a Dentist without Borders pull rotten teeth. So much for your airconditioned house and soft bed back home.*

*I want you to say “yes,” but are you sure you want to say yes?*

Jesus is talking about the cost of discipleship.

“I’ll follow you, Jesus, but first let me go back home and bury my father.”

Following Jesus does not mean that your filial ties will come unraveled, it’s that you’ll discover you’re tied to so many more people besides just your blood relatives. The word “family” takes on another whole dimension when you walk with Jesus.

“I’ll follow, just let me say goodbye to the folks at home.”

To this Jesus says if you’re following me, you’re looking forward not backwards. A farmer can’t plow a straight row by looking behind him.

Following Jesus ruptures some of life’s old patterns.

Church membership and discipleship aren’t necessarily the same thing, of course, but if we’re going to ally ourselves with a community of disciples, then we’re going to make sacrifices with and for one other.

We're going to show up to worship together. We will weep with those who weep. We will rejoice with those who rejoice. Our living and spending patterns may change. We'll help each other with life's heavy lifting. Plowing in the kingdom of God means sacrifice; and being a disciple means putting your hands on some metaphorical plow and getting down to focused, hard, meaningful, joyful work.

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In Jesus, we see a man focused on his goal. Our passage today begins with a reminder that he's heading to Jerusalem. Luke wants us to notice that Jesus cuts through Samaritan territory. For Luke, Jesus heads through this non-jewish land to remind readers that Jesus has come to welcome all people, not just Jews. Luke is, perhaps, the first universalist.

We note that the Samaritans will not receive Jesus on his journey precisely because Jesus is going to Jerusalem—a Jewish city. (The parable of the Good Samaritan may be surfacing in your mind, as it should. We'll study that passage together soon.) Here we get a glimpse of the hostility between Jews and their Samaritan cousins. If the Samaritans offer no hospitality, Jesus and his disciples will have no respite walking through that land. How will they eat? Where will they sleep? *Foxes have their holes and the birds of the air have their nests, but the son of man...? Are you sure you want to follow me?*

The disciples ask a wonderful, very human question: *because these Samaritans are rejecting us, do you want us to use the power you've given us to "call down fire from heaven to consume them?"*

There's a whole sermon in that question and Jesus' response. When people do us wrong, let's punish them (!). Can't we curse them? Disciples then and now often want to use their power to perform a "punitive miracle."<sup>[1]</sup>

But Jesus will have nothing of this. These disciples don't yet understand—at least not fully—that Jesus has come not to condemn the world but to save it (John 3:16), not to exclude some and love others, but to love everybody.

Luke also wants us to notice that Jesus doesn't have time to dwell on this (predictable?) setback. He's plowing straight ahead. His face is set towards Jerusalem. He's not plowing a crooked row by looking backwards. His journey has a purpose, and we get the sense that he's on a deadline.

And that is another aspect of this text. We get a hint of urgency in this passage. Jesus invites these would-be disciples to follow. Now. Today.

If they say "yes," but show up late, they'll miss the bus. If you say yes to the Saturday wedding but show up on Monday, you've missed all the fun.

Sure, there are other weddings. And there are other buses. You can become a disciple tomorrow, or the next day, or the next, or the next.

But why miss a single day?

It might not be convenient. I might never be completely ready or capable. I might not, even, be fully willing. *But yes!*

All of this is food for thought on a sleepy Sunday morning when Jesus says, "Follow me."

AMEN.

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<sup>[1]</sup> (p. 830, *Luke, Anchor Bible*), Introduction, Translation, and Notes by Joseph A. Fitzmyer. Doubleday & Co, New York: 1981.