

FRIDAY

THREE MEN ON THE ROAD

Luke 9:57-62

My father coined an expression that he often used to make it clear to me that I was not thinking clearly: “Your head is full of broken glass!”

This (admittedly unusual) expression makes an important point. Wrong thinking means something is broken inside your mind; and wrong thinking can have painful consequences. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, to suffer and die. He encounters three men, apparently in quick succession. In each case he questions whether they are thinking straight about what it means to be his disciple (the dominant term for a Christian in the Gospels and Acts).

The first man offers to follow Jesus without being invited. His enthusiasm knows no bounds. He confidently asserts that he will follow Jesus wherever he lays his head. *But what if there is no bed?* asks Jesus.

Three young men once arrived at a mission I was leading and announced, “The Lord has told us to join you”. I said that since the Lord had not given me advance warning, no sleeping arrangements had been made for them, and so they would have to sleep on the floor. They were nowhere to be

found the next morning. It seems they had not reckoned on the fact that those who follow Jesus may have no pillow on which to lay their heads!

Unlike the first man, who volunteers, the second man is called by Jesus to follow him. However, he wants to wait until after his father's funeral. Was it just about to take place? Judging by Jesus' response, the man's father was still alive. He was saying, *Yes, I will follow you... but later.* The Lord gives a famous, somewhat enigmatic, and possibly proverbial response: "Leave the dead to bury their own dead." In essence, when it comes to following Jesus, nothing else, not even family ties, can be allowed to take priority. Nothing and nobody—period—must take priority over Jesus.

The third man, like the first, also volunteers, but with a little more caution. (Had he overheard the first two conversations?) Wisdom dictates that he state a minor qualification up front. He would like to say his goodbyes at home—a modest request surely. And perhaps a carefully thought-out one, since it echoes Elisha's words when Elijah called him for future service (1 Kings 19:19-21). Jesus responds in kind when he says that no one who puts his hand to the plough and then looks back is fit for the kingdom of God. His reference to a plough reminds this man of what Elisha actually did when he asked, "Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you"—exactly that! Elisha immediately kissed his past life goodbye. He took the twelve yoke of oxen with which he had been ploughing (he must have come from a wealthy family), sacrificed them, cooked the meat on a fire kindled by burning the wood of the yokes, and held a becoming-a-trainee-prophet party for his friends. It was the farming equivalent of burning his boats.

Earlier in the Gospel, Luke had recorded Jesus' parable of the Sower (8:4-8). The same seed (God's word) falls on three kinds of soil which bear no lasting fruit. The seed sometimes

