

A more intense *follow me*

By [LaDonna Sanders Nkosi](#)

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The invitation *follow me* is a common refrain in the ministry of Jesus. In our Gospel text for this week, the call to follow is intensified. Jesus has now “set his face toward Jerusalem,” and his response to someone who wants to follow him is an extreme one: “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”

This response used to puzzle me greatly. Some years ago, when I was finishing seminary, I was discerning whether to pursue a job in an established congregation or to continue in the call to nurture a new congregation I and other seminarians had planted. This new ministry was not funded, and we had limited experience on that front. I could sense God’s call very strongly to go forth with the new ministry. But questions swirled for me about how to pay for the work—and how to pay my own rent.

A classmate who was not facing this same dilemma quoted this passage to me. “Well you know,” she said, “foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” At the time, I did not appreciate this advice. I wanted to tell her, “But I’m not the Son of man. I am not Jesus!”

Jesus asks another to follow him and the man answers, “Lord, let me go and bury my father.” Jesus offers a less than pastoral quip: “Let the dead bury their own dead, but as for you, go and proclaim the Kingdom of God.” Harsh words—but at this point,

Jesus himself is on the path to sacrifice. Having set his face to Jerusalem, he is embodying the gravity of his call: losing the support of loved ones, being misunderstood, public ridicule, trial and execution.

Another says to Jesus, “I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say farewell to those at my home.” There is an endless list of things that I plan and hope to do before doing the things that God has called me to. Phone calls to return, relatives to see—let me do this and this, and then I will get to that. Priorities. Jesus says, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God.”

In this week’s reading, *follow me* is not the same sort of open invitation it was earlier in Jesus’s ministry. It is much more intense. Jesus gives clear instruction and admonition on what it means to follow him. One has to leave custom, family, and personal priority behind. This is definitely a reckoning text.