Sen. Simon Cameron of Pennsylvania wondered why Congress was being asked to fund the Smithsonian Institution. “I am tired of all this thing called science here,” Cameron said.

To be sure, predictions can be problematic! In out text, James and John make a prediction that goes awry. Luke tells us thatJesus “*set his face to go to Jerusalem*” (Luke 9:51), a city that is important to his ministry and mission. But while Jesus is very clear about where he is going, confusion arises among his disciples and a few potential followers, causing them to make some problematic predictions.

Two disciples enter a Samaritan village and attempt to arrange some hospitality. The Samaritans do not receive Jesus, because they do not support his plans to go to Jerusalem. James and John are incensed. Predicting Jesus’ reaction, they say to him, “*Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?*” (v. 54). They are convinced that Jesus will order the complete destruction of this rude and unwelcoming town. But their prediction is problematic. Jesus is not interested in the destruction of the Samaritans. Instead, Jesus rebukes James and John for their destructive impulses. Then the disciples and Jesus move on to another village.

A desire to use violence in the name of God is not unusual. The various Crusades to recapture the Holy Land sanctioned the slaughter of tens of thousands of Muslims by Christians. During the Spanish Inquisition, Christians used imprisonment and execution to combat heresy. In European witch trials, “good Christian” men and women used flogging and exile to punish suspected witches. Even today, Christians use violence against members of other religions, secular groups, and even other Christian denominations. Researchers note that violence is often driven by negative emotions, such as anger or fear. James and John are certainly angry at the Samaritans for rejecting Jesus.

Positive feelings of power and dominance can also drive violence. Psychology professor David Chester observes that even positive emotions play a big role in aggressive behavior. “Aggression isn’t just about ‘I’m angry and I want to hit someone,’” Chester says. “It’s also about how it feels good sometimes to get revenge on someone who has wronged you.” Remember this insight the next time you want to lash out at someone who treats you badly. Your anger might be righteous, but Jesus is not interested in retribution.

As Jesus and the disciples are going along the road to Jerusalem, someone says to Jesus, “*I will follow you wherever you go*.” Jesus says to him, “*Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head*” (vv. 57-58). The man probably thinks about that and says to himself, “Gee, I really like to sleep in my own bed at night.” At this point, it seems that he slips away and heads home.

Then, Jesus says to another potential disciple, “*Follow me*.” But the man says, “*Lord, first let me go and bury my father*” (v. 59). That seems like a reasonable request. A good next step. After all, the Ten Commandments say, “*Honor your father and your mother*” (Exodus 20:12). But Jesus says, “*Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God*” (Luke 9:60). The grieving man does not know how to respond, so he drops out of the crowd, probably to take care of the funeral arrangements.

Finally, another potential follower says, “*I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home*” (v. 61). Again, a reasonable and respectful request: A quick good-bye to the family, so they will not think that their loved one has disappeared. But Jesus says, “*No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God*” (v. 62). The request of the final follower is denied.

The first man envisions a place to rest. The second assumes he will be able to bury his father. The third anticipates a chance to say good-bye to his family. These seem like reasonable expectations, but Jesus considers them to be problematic. All three of these potential disciples fail to see that a future with Jesus will be very different from the past. They cannot imagine a time in which they do not have a bed in which to sleep, or the opportunity to go to a funeral, or the chance to visit with their family.

They are like the man, writing about airplanes in the March 1904 issue of *Popular Science Monthly*, who said” “The machines will eventually be fast, they will be used in sport, but they are not to be thought of as commercial carriers.” In our modern world, around the globe, roughly 100,000 flights take off and land every day. Talk about a problematic prediction!

Jesus calls his followers to look towards a new way of life, one that is hard to predict with any accuracy. In the very next chapter of Luke, Jesus sends out 70 of his followers with a set of commands, telling them to “*carry no purse, no bag, no sandals*” (10:4). “*Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house*,’” says Jesus. “*Eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you’*” (vv. 5, 8-9). Even in this endeavor, Jesus knew it would be difficult to predict the response. He tells his followers if the townsfolk will not receive his Gospel, the disciples are to shake the dust off their feet as an indictment against that town. They are to move on to more receptive hearts.

When Jesus looks into the future, he sees the kingdom of God coming near. He does not see comfortable beds, respectful funeral services, or satisfying family visits. Jesus envisions a future that is very difficult for us to predict, because it is a future still being created by God. But this does not mean there is nothing for the followers of Jesus to do. “We can’t build the kingdom by our own efforts,” writes biblical scholar N.T. Wright. “But we can build *for* the kingdom. Every act of justice, every word of truth, every creation of genuine beauty, every act of self-sacrificial love, will be reaffirmed [in the kingdom of God].” All are solid next steps.

Such acts do not have to be shocking to be significant. The cup of coffee given with graciousness to a homeless person at a day shelter, “the piece of work done honestly and thoroughly; the prayer that comes from heart and mind together; all of these and many more,” says Wright, “are building blocks for the kingdom.”

Looking to the future, we followers of Jesus often fail to see what he desires for us. Like James and John, we assume that Jesus wants to destroy the people who disagree with us. Like the three potential followers on the road, we cannot envision how discipleship will disrupt our normal routines. The truth is that our assumptions and predictions will cause problems for us unless we can align them with the coming of the kingdom. When we act in ways that respond to the words of Jesus, we add important building blocks to the kingdom of God.

Prayer: God, You know there are days when we see others not following you and we want them to be punished. We see people spreading hate and fear and know this isn’t your way. We see people mistreating each other and we are angry. We understand why James and John asked Jesus to bring down fire from heaven to consume the hostile Samaritans. But this is not your way. Forgive us for wanting to repay hate with hate and violence with violence. God, we promised to follow you, yet so many other things pull at our time and attention. We will follow you as soon as our ‘to do’ list is tackled, our house is clean, and we’ve cared for our family. Forgive us God, for not putting you first in our lives. God, we ask that you give us righteous anger at the injustice in the world and that you help us to have our priorities in order, so we may follow you as true disciples of Jesus. Amen.

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**Problematic Predictions**

Sunday, June 26, 2022 [Luke 9:51-62](https://biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+9%3a51-62&language=en&version=NIV)

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

People are not very good at predicting the future. When the Covid-19 pandemic hit in March 2020, many of us thought we would be home for a few weeks. The virus would pass, and we would be back to school, work, and church. We thought surely, we would be able to gather for Easter Sunday in April! Well, we know it did not turn out that way. Most of us *did* make it back for Easter…in April of 2021. But our vision of a quick end to the pandemic was not the most boneheaded prediction of all time. Throughout history, people have made some terrible assessments of what a good next step would be.

Columnist John Kelly lists several real stinkers. In the year 1486, a royal commission recommended that King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain *not* provide funding for explorer Christopher Columbus. The commission members insisted that sailing west to Asia would take a ridiculously long three years because they believed that there was nothing between Europe and Asia but a vast, featureless ocean. The king and queen funded Columbus anyway. He landed in the Bahamas in October 1492, starting a movement of globalization that continues to this day. We now know of the terrible human cost to this movement, especially among the indigenous peoples; and problems continue with globalization today. But the Spanish commission was wrong to assume that there was nothing of value between Europe and Asia.

The value of land is always tough to predict. Nearly 400 years after Columbus, a congressman from New York named Orange Ferriss objected to the United States paying Russia $7 million for the Alaska Territories. Ferris thought it was too much money, even though it worked out to just two cents per acre. Ferriss complained to his fellow congressmen, “Of what possible commercial importance can this territory be?” Congressman Ferriss was very wrong to assume that Alaska had no economic value.

And speaking of politicians who got it wrong: In 1892, Alabama Rep. Hilary A. Herbert wanted to “put in the knife” into funding for the U.S. Geological Survey. Herbert said the agency didn’t contribute to “the protection of life or liberty or property.” Rep. Henry C. Snodgrass of Tennessee felt the same way about establishing the National Zoo. “I do not believe the American people, hundreds and thousands of whom are today without homes, ought to be taxed to afford shelter and erect homes for snakes, raccoons, opossums, bears and all the creeping and slimy things of the earth,” he said in 1892. Three decades earlier,