Albert Einstein, the German-born mathematician, slowly watched his homeland give in to Adolf Hitler's Fascist dictatorship. Einstein wondered if any were going to stand up and oppose Hitler. He said, and I quote, "When Hitlerism came to Germany, I expected the universities to oppose it. Instead they embraced it. I hoped for the press to denounce it, but instead they propagated its teachings. One by one the leaders and institutions which should have opposed the Nazi philosophy bowed meekly to its authority. Only one institution met it with vigorous opposition and that was the Christian Church." Einstein confessed, "That which I once despised, I now love with a passion I cannot describe." The commitment of the Church in standing against evil made a profound impression upon Einstein. Those individuals in the 1930's understood the cost associated with their actions, and they did not back down. The church today is challenged by Jesus to do the same in today’s gospel.

The response of Jesus to the three would-be followers, described in the second part of today’s gospel, exemplifies the wholehearted constancy and sacrificial ministry that the Christian mission requires. Many of us may be surprised at Jesus’ sharp response to the first man’s willing discipleship. Undoubtedly, Jesus saw more deeply into the man’s heart than we can. Jesus is simply honest about the demands and the cost of a commitment we might make too lightly and a journey we might undertake too easily. “Let the dead bury their dead”: This response may sound too harsh. But this man’s father was not dead or sick. He simply wished to stay with his father until his death. Jesus knew that later he would find another reason to delay the call. Jesus did not want another would-be follower to go home and bid farewell to his dear ones. Hence Jesus rebukes him saying that the plowman must look ahead rather than back. Looking back while plowing causes crooked lines in the field.
As in the case of Elisha and the apostles, our commitment becomes our life. But today, more than ever, people make commitments too easily and then break them. This is the age of the lack of true commitment. The problem today is not that people are living together without being married; the problem is that they do not have the courage to *make* the commitment of marriage. In recent years, the age of marriage has increased by more than three years in the West, that is, more than 10%. Modern people find many excuses for delaying marriage: “Well, let’s get good jobs and financial security first.” Another familiar excuse is: "I want to be free to come and go as I please!” Another excuse for delaying marriage is: “Let’s live together first. We’ll see if we’re compatible!” But the fact is that the longer unmarried couples live together, the more they experience their incompatibility!

We all know there is a tremendous shortage of priests and religious men because our young people are unwilling to make commitments to God by committing themselves to life-long celibacy, to a diocese or to the vowed life of a religious community. The argument, “I don’t want to make that commitment because I don’t want to give everything away,” shows an incorrect notion of Christian freedom. We begin to be free only when we start the process called commitment, and our freedom is realized only when we give ourselves away in love. Unfortunately, like those three would-be followers, a lot of our youngsters are still confused and ill-prepared for any kind of mission for their lives. As a result, they become adept at evading Christ’s call to discipleship.

We need to pray for strength to honor all our commitments. We are here this morning because, in one way or another, we have said to Jesus, “I will follow you.” But the truth of the matter is that most of us don't want to follow Jesus because we want Him to follow us. Hence, we are only partially faithful to Him. But the good news is that we are following Him as best we can. We will leave this
hour of Eucharistic worship and return to the world with all sorts of tough choices and difficult demands. So, let’s pray for strength. Let’s ask almighty God for forgiveness when we fail, and to daily renew our determination to walk with Jesus by being loyal to our spouse and family, earning our living honestly, and living not only peacefully, but lovingly, with our neighbors.

Father Bob Knippenberg, Pastor