

The Jesus Type

Luke 9:51-62

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Online dating services are now rejecting people upfront if they fail a personality test or don't meet a certain set of criteria. It makes you wonder what type of person Jesus is looking for in a discipleship date.

He's a tall, blue-eyed actor. A 25-year-old single guy who makes terrific calamari, enjoys chick flicks, and always remembers birthdays.

Sounds like a decent catch if you're a single gal looking for a pal. Forget decent. A great catch — one would think.

Yet, according to eHarmony.com, the online dating service, when this eligible young man finished the matchmaker's required 40-minute personality test, he was rejected.

Even good, decent people get rejected.

"I was stunned," said the actor to The Wall Street Journal. "Is that even possible?" He assumed that an online dating service virtually guaranteed that you would meet someone. Never in his wildest dreams did he think that he would be rejected.

It seems that some Internet matchmakers are flirting with a new marketing tactic — giving customers the cold shoulder. As if the process of dating weren't painful enough! The Web site used by this sorry suitor boots people who are deemed unmatchable by its software, without ever giving them a reason. Other sites will tell you their highly selective standards upfront, such as the online service that requires that you have a degree from an elite college.

And don't think that you can tell a little lie about honors from Harvard. To prove it, you might need to fax in your transcript.

It's getting harder and harder to prove that you are the right type. One online site does a quick evaluation of your personality and then lists quirks that might turn off potential dates, such as its judgment that you talk "too loud." How it assesses this from a 10-minute online quiz is a complete mystery.

Another site requires an invitation from a current member if you want to dive into its dating pool.

So, when you go online in search of a date, be prepared for the fact that you might not be the right type, even if you are tall, blue-eyed and a sucker for sentimental movies.

Jesus rejected people too.

But here's an even bigger question, one that is at the heart of today's passage of Scripture: Are you Jesus' type?

As Jesus completes his ministry in the Galilee region, and begins his long journey toward Jerusalem, he encounters a variety of men and women, people of all types, and he begins a process of elimination that is bound to strike us as rather severe — even by the standards of eHarmony.com.

First, he enters a Samaritan village, and discovers that there is absolutely no way that he is going to be able to develop a relationship with anyone in the town.

The Samaritans refuse to receive him because he is heading toward Jerusalem — and this is the wrong city to be going to or coming from if you want to feel the love from Samaritans, since their holy place was Mount Gerizim.

It would be like going to a baseball game at Fenway Park, wearing a New York Yankees cap and a “Yankees Rule” T-shirt. Bottom line: These folks are absolutely incompatible.

Then, Jesus encounters a man along the road, an Idealist, perhaps a Romantic, who says to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.”

But Jesus senses that he might have the wrong idea about the life of discipleship, and so he administers this little test of expectations: “Foxes have holes,” says Jesus, “and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Luke 9:58).

We don't know exactly what this first would-be disciple is expecting, but he might be thinking that Jesus the Messiah is going to be his meal ticket. To such dreams of comfort and affluence, Jesus gives a rude wake-up call:

“You want a life of luxury?” he seems to be asking. “You’re looking in the wrong place”.

A short time later, Jesus sees another potential disciple, a Pragmatist, responsible, reasonable and rational — someone who has passed the initial round of screenings on eDiscipleship.com, and so he extends the invitation, “Follow me.” But the fellow says, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father” (v. 59).

Is this an unreasonable demand? It doesn’t seem to be, at first. In fact, the duty to bury the dead was taken very seriously by devout Jews, and it was considered good form to care for one’s deceased relatives. It isn’t like this guy is saying, “Lord, first let me go and play the slot machines ... or, first let me go and do some Ecstasy ... or, first let me go and knock some heads.”

The guy is trying to be a solid citizen and a decent catch, but Jesus isn’t impressed.

“Lord, first let me go and bury my father” turns out to be a red flag on the discipleship survey, an answer that threatens to get the man tossed from the discipleship pool. “Let the dead bury their own dead,” insists Jesus; “but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God” (v. 60).

Jesus sounds harsh here, and more than a little insensitive. But what he’s trying to say is this: If you want to be my type, you have to focus on life, not death. Put your energy into proclaiming the kingdom of God, not into digging holes for dead bodies. Jesus certainly knows that corpses need to be put in the ground, but he assumes that there are many spiritually dead non-disciples that can do this particular duty. If you want to be a disciple, your focus has to be on the kingdom and nothing else.

Finally, another applicant, a Procrastinator, approaches Jesus and says, “I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home.”

Jesus hits the reject button with the words, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God” (vv. 61-62). Jesus will not allow anyone to turn from the path that he is calling them to follow. He expects radical commitment, total intensity, complete focus. Anything less than 100 percent devotion simply will not allow a discipleship match to be made.

As it turns out, none of these people is Jesus' type. Not the Idealist, the Pragmatist or the Procrastinator.

The Jesus type:

So, where does this leave us?

Are we willing to turn our backs on comfort and duty and family in order to follow Jesus on the path to the kingdom of God? If this sounds like a relationship that involves nothing but pain and suffering and sacrifice, then the answer might be, "No. I don't want to get into this. I'd rather be alone."

But Jesus is not trying to lure us into a dysfunctional and destructive relationship. What Jesus is offering us is a life of intense happiness, deep fulfillment and unending love. It's just that he needs to put us through a rather serious screening to see if we're serious about this kind of relationship with him.

Today's Scripture teaches that happiness will come if we are compatible with Jesus in several important ways. First, we need to share his determination to travel to Jerusalem, and this means seeing our final goal as resurrection life with God. If we focus entirely on Wall Street or Capitol Hill or Silicon Valley or Hollywood, if we end up putting all our passion into places that promise us money or power or fame, then we will find ourselves falling out of relationship with Jesus. It is only by traveling with him to Jerusalem, and moving with him through sacrifice to new life, that we will discover our deepest fulfillment as human beings.

Disciples are headed for Jerusalem — not Nazareth, or Jericho, or Tiberius. They're headed for the cross, for commitment, for sacrifice, but also for a meaningful life, fulfilling love and compassionate service.

Next, we are asked to put our faith in Jesus, rather than in any of the creature comforts of this world. We are challenged to trust Jesus to give our lives meaning and balance and security — not our bank accounts, pension funds, media rooms, luxury sedans, hot tubs or high-speed Internet connections.

One of the shocking discoveries of life in the 21st century is that true satisfaction doesn't come through a high standard of living and an endless array of attractive luxury items. Many of us thought it would, but it doesn't.

Instead, inner peace comes through a life that has meaning — meaning that can be found by following Jesus.

Finally, we are challenged to look ahead, not back. It is so tempting to gaze to the past and wonder why our lives turned out the way they did, so easy to second-guess ourselves and play “what-if” games with the choices we have made.

But Jesus says that no one who “looks back” is fit for the kingdom of God, and he calls us to focus forward on the life that God has in store for us. Any happiness we experience is going to come from looking ahead, with hope. Any fulfillment we feel is going to come from moving forward, with faith. Any love we enjoy is going to come not from new friends or new spouses or new relatives, but instead from building a new future with our existing friends and spouses and relatives.

Compatibility with Jesus

This personality test forces us to look inward, and discover what kind of persons we want to be. It reminds us that we have the power to make ourselves compatible with Jesus, and through this compatibility we can enjoy the abundant life he offers. If we walk in his way, and focus on his goals, we'll find ourselves experiencing levels of happiness, fulfillment and love that we never dreamed possible.

We'll be Jesus' type.

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In today's scripture Jesus begins his fateful journey to Jerusalem. We human beings have many excuses not to follow Jesus today, but Jesus puts into divine perspective all our feeble excuses.

Luke 9:51-62

New Revised Standard Version:

When the days drew near for him to be taken up, Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" But Jesus turned and rebuked them. Then they went on to another village.

As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." To another Jesus said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." But Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."