

Year C, Proper 18  
 September 4, 2016  
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“You cannot become my disciple” (unless)... Luke 14:25-33

If you take nothing else away from today’s difficult readings remember this- God knows you as you are- not as you project yourself to be. From the intimacy of Psalm 139, “You knit me together in my mother’s womb” (v. 12) to Jeremiah’s analogy of God as the potter and we the clay (18:1-11), it is clear that when we run and hide we deceive only ourselves. God is not fooled. He knows us; after all, he made us.

This same intimacy carries through to the Gospel as told by Jesus today. The strong language of Jesus suggests he knows our thoughts before they come out of our mouths. We hear the Gospel and think, “Okay, I’m with you Jesus. I’ll be your disciple” and then we begin to compartmentalize our lives. I’m with you Jesus in this segment of my life and that one, but the part over there (of which I’m ashamed), well, I’ll just hide it, and Jesus will never know. Wrong! He already knows and the Good News is that his call to discipleship is not predicated on getting right first and then joining Team Jesus.

Compartmentalization is a skill may serve us well in high pressure situations and allow us to accomplish certain tasks even when we have other emotions tugging on our hearts. The ability to do so is certainly an acquired skill and part of maturing; failure to do so would leave us in a perpetual cycle of temper tantrums. Ask any three year-old. The pendulum can also swing too far the other way wherein we simply bury anything uncomfortable and never take a real inventory of our lives. Jesus calls us as we are in our sinfulness, in our brokenness, and declares that he can use us with several big “if’s”.

If we are willing to make Jesus the superior relationship

If we are willing to deal seriously with what it will cost us to be disciples

If we are willing to let go of worldly possessions for something far more valuable

If you are willing to entertain such extraordinary preconditions then Jesus will have you as a disciple. Otherwise he says something that seems very antithetical to 21<sup>st</sup> Century Evangelism, “You cannot be my disciple” (Luke 13:27). So much for sweet doormat Jesus. Perhaps that is our own fault and not the fault of Jesus. Maybe we have made too great an accommodation with culture to reassure people that what they already believe is in perfect harmony with the demands of the Gospel.

Jesus demands full allegiance, “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:28). Is Jesus really calling us to “hate” someone? Perhaps the word could make more sense to us if we remembered he is being hyperbolic to get our attention and that if it comes to make an either/or decision in times of conflict that our devotion should lie with Jesus. The Jesus

relationship takes priority. Additionally, it might be helpful to think of our relationships with a certain degree of detachment (*Preaching Through the Christian Year*, Fred Craddock, p. 401).

“Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:29). Are you willing to suffer for the sake of the Gospel? Are you willing to bear being ostracized for your faith? Are you willing to endure the shame that may accompany being identified as a follower of Jesus? In our world, this seems far removed, but in many parts of the world being a Christian is a cause for putting oneself in harm’s way and possible death. It is no accident that each week we pray for the persecuted church throughout the world. These are the people who have made commitments to Jesus and are often paying a heavy price. They do so because they see clearly the choice between physical life and eternal life and understand wherein lies the peace of God that surpasses all understanding.

“None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions” (Luke 14:33). First, let’s be honest. None of us has taken the road of St. Francis and given it all away. Does that mean we are not worthy of Team Jesus? Not necessarily. Again, such a call uses a bit of hyperbole to make the point that a tithe, ten percent, sure seems do-able when compared with Jesus’ call to give it all over and follow him. When we hold our Stewardship Drive in the fall, it has two main objectives. The first is to raise money for the church. The second and more important objective is to teach and model generosity. If we aren’t willing to give up some percentage of our possessions we will never be able to give it all up. Consider the stewardship educational programs just that- educational, meant to uphold and teach God’s generosity as recorded in the scriptures and history of the church.

A little girl who lives outside of Louisiana was with her parents when she found a \$100 bill in a store parking lot. They promptly went inside the store to return the money, but the manager said, “No one has reported losing the money and there is no way for us to figure out who lost it, so you can keep it.” You can imagine the little girl’s excitement. The next morning, without prompting from anyone, the girl put the \$100 bill in an envelope and mailed it to a friend in Baton Rouge whose family had been severely impacted by the recent flooding.

These are big things that Jesus is asking us to do-  
Place Him before family  
Be willing to endure suffering for the sake of the faith  
Give away all our possessions

These are very important issues with which to wrestle, but sometimes they are so far from where we find ourselves that we simply turn the page and move on to another passage. Real commitment to Jesus requires us to wrestle with difficult Biblical passages and not just the stories that we already know and love. So how do we access today’s difficult passage?

Perhaps we go back to where we started and remember that God already knows us. Jesus knows our secrets and our tendencies and yet he continues to call us anyway. Perhaps the means to dialogue with Jesus about familial relationships, enduring suffering, and the

relationship with our possessions is to start with that one thing that is already on our hearts, the thing we tried to tamp down but grudgingly acknowledge that we need to work on. So what is that one thing for you? What is the one thing that you can name today that would make you a better Christian? Identify that, and when you come to the rail for communion remember that Jesus already knows your not so secret-secret. He loves you just the same, has called you to follow, and asks you to take inventory to begin prioritizing the relationship that really matters. *Amen.*