**9/4/22**

**Cost of Discipleship**

**Luke 14:25-33**

Last week Chip started and ended his sermon with a popular quote from Saint Nick. Which rung true in a manner of sorts because “Jesus observed guests jockeying for position at the table. He used the opportunity to teach his hearers to choose humility rather than self-exaltation. Jesus also made an appeal for hosts to imitate God’s gracious hospitality to those in need.” (1) We were called to be humble, and sit towards the back of the banquet, and be blessed to be called up front by the host if that honor was to be distinguished upon us. We were also called to share and care with others we don’t always consider doing so with. Now, sometimes we find these things very easy, and at other times we struggle with them. I am not quite too sure why that is, but I do know for certain that it in either of these cases we can improve. Because we are fortunate enough to be made in His image and likeness.

Today’s Prayer of the Day makes our call from the Gospel Lesson pretty simple. We are to contemplate the cost of discipleship. Whoa, whoa, whoa… hold on a minute there!!! Did you just say simple?!?! And wait a minute didn’t you just try and sneak cost in there too?!?! Well, of course I did!!! Now you all know that we have been given free will, and we all have plenty of things, or stuff. As a result, we can manage to stray off course in one way or another, whether we realize it or not. However, we have to realize that there is a sacrifice to be able to get to hang out behind those so-called pearly gates one day, and that does not fit the normal standards that can manage to confine us here on earth. So, I invite us take to recite the Prayer of the Day again, but together in a slower and more intentional manner. That way we can focus on the words and the guidance we are getting. Now, I’ll give you a few seconds to locate it in your bulletins… Alright??? Do you have it??? Good… Now remember, slow and intentional here speedy ones… “Direct us, O Lord God, in all our doings with your continual help, that in all our works, begun, continued, and ended in you, we may glorify your holy name; and finally, by your mercy, bring us to everlasting life, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.” (1) By this prayer we come to realize that there is no other than Him. We can do the work of our hands and feet, but not without his help and guidance. We are also reminded that, “Those who follow him should know from the outset that completing the course of discipleship will finally mean renouncing all other allegiances.” (1) Yes, that means renouncing self, and all other things and people that we managed to put first in the place of honor and glory that they should have never made it to. And we are forever reminded that, “Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” (1)

So, let us take a deeper look at today’s Gospel Lesson. “When we first hear of Jesus’ position on family we can be shocked. At first, it seems that Jesus is being greedy, wants our loyalty at the expense of family and spousal love, and wants us to actively work to disengage ourselves from all human attachments. If that were Jesus’ true position, we would accept it and do it. After all, Jesus is God and knows what he is doing. However, that is not his position.” (3)

“When Jesus tells us that we must put him and his “needs” above all else, he is saying no more than we say to ourselves, in relation to our family and job or career. Who has not come to the point where he or she must make a decision about priorities? Who has not, maybe after a long time and many mistakes, has not said, “My family comes first”? Jesus takes this one step further, and a big step it is, and says that God, He, must come first. Now, it does not seem so radical, but it is. It might be hard to put job or career second, especially when we have deluded ourselves for so long into thinking we were doing it for our family, not for ourselves and our ego. But it is really hard to put God first, because we know that God can do very well without us putting him first, thank you. Our families truly need us and we need them. God does not need us, even though we need him. We do not expect our families to put us first, even though we would be delighted. We expect them to put their lives and happiness ahead of us. So, putting God first does not come easy, nor does it come naturally. Nor does the analogy just used apply completely. Jesus is asking of us the humanly impossible and, in doing so, he is saying that we are capable of it- with his help and grace.” (3)

I know for sure it is really easy to follow our Lord when things are going right. When there are no hardships in the way, or when we are not expecting a prayer to be answered. Or is it? Well, maybe not, because there are distractions, or sometimes we get in the mode or thought process that I got this, but it is dangerous to think we got this on our own. Isn’t it?!?!

So, Jesus kind of presses pause, and just like the groups of people that followed him back in the day, he puts us to the test. Now back in the day, “Those to whom Jesus put these questions were many people who had been drawn to him by the great blessings he had brought. They had heard about this Jesus. Many had come to him with their problems and Jesus had solved those problems. The ill and diseased had come for physical cures. The disabled had come for healing and wholeness. And Jesus granted those. But now he asked them how long they would stay with him. If he journeyed 2, 3, 4, 5 days or even a week without doing a miracle, would they keep following? When he reached Jerusalem and faced bitter opposition from the Pharisees and other religious leaders, would they stay with him?” (2)

“This morning he puts those questions to this multitude that is traveling with him. You and I have been drawn to him by the blessings he has poured out on us. But how long will you follow? If in his wisdom he doesn’t miraculously cure a loved one of a terminal illness, will you still follow? If in his wisdom he determines that it’s time for a loved one to leave this world, will you still follow? If in his love for you he thinks it wise for you to carry a burden right now, will you still follow? And if because you are a disciple you meet some opposition in your life, will you still follow? And as he makes this total claim on your life, will you still follow? Can you afford to be a disciple of Jesus when this is the cost?!?” (2)

I would venture to say if I was there then I would have followed, and we might even perceive that back then it was with less distractions or things to question. The cost of discipleship these days has seemed to get much harder, or it has even seemed to get cloudier hasn’t it? Just maybe it is because we have all these things at the tips of our fingers that can easily distract us from our journey. However, we need to remind ourselves that these things we have on the tips of our fingers can put us back on our journey too. Our phones are a tool, just like books and the Bible are to us. And, one of my favorite things from Bible Studies comes to mind here. Hey Vince, what does the magic box say?

So, I caution you, and I encourage you to press pause. Take some time to reevaluate things and realign yourself with His call and His purpose. Coming together as a congregation, and as a community, allows us to be blessed to have strength in numbers to be right with Him. We are forever reminded we don’t need to do it on our own. We are also encouraged that back then the people were called to sacrifice all of the temporal things here on earth, and we are called to do the same thing now. That is in order to have a much more extravagant and awesome life thereafter with Him.

Now let’s examine a few other viewpoints or aspects here. “As a gimmick to get us to join organizations-book clubs, web sites, classes for this or that, diet programs, etc.- the sales pitch includes a free trial period. As a gimmick to get us to buy things, there is a promise to get our money back after a period of time if we are not fully satisfied. This amounts to a trial commitment rather than a real one, a commitment “at no cost to you.” Commitment to Christ and his Church does not work that way. It is all or nothing from the outset. Yet, there are people who seem to belong to the Church but really are not committed Christians because they are only trying out Christianity. They are like the crowd in this gospel story who are following Jesus all the way to Jerusalem but they are not committed to him. They have paid no real price of admission or commitment other than taking a few days off from their routine to enjoy the novelty of traveling with a gifted preacher. Many who profess to be Christians are like those folks. Oh, they find Jesus Christ interesting and his two-thousand-year-old Church has lots of interesting history, practices and doctrines, but they are no more committed to Jesus than are those who take out trial memberships in clubs. They have not changed their attitudes or behavior. They have only opened yet another “option” in their lives, a “take it or leave it” proposition depending upon “what’s in it for me.”” (3)

“But the despair that comes from such an evaluation of our spiritual checkbooks is exactly what Jesus wants to bring out by asking if you can afford to be his disciple. You see, many of those traveling with him believed they were doing something for Jesus and themselves by following. Many of them also seemed to be looking only for those temporary, earthly blessings of physical healing and satisfaction. But his blessings go far beyond our earthly ideas of what blessings are. Jesus’ blessings are eternal. And the cost of such blessings of eternal life is unaffordable for us. But not for Him! You see, Jesus brings us to that despair and hopelessness so that we’ll listen when he says, "All you who are weary and burdened", that is all you who know and are bothered by your sin and guilt, and who know where it leads, "come to me and I will give you rest".” (2)

“Most certainly, Jesus speaks these words to challenge his followers to give thought how these three areas of their lives: family, life’s purpose, and possessions impact our walk of faith. We must struggle with what it does mean for us to be a follower or disciple of Jesus Christ. It is necessary for us to determine what the cost of discipleship is and if we are willing to pay it.” (4)

“Jesus’ words also draw us to his cross for his forgiveness and grace. We will fail. Our faith will falter, and at times we will consider the cost too high. Those are not times for despair, but rather times for confession, repentance and forgiveness.” (4)

AMEN

**References**

(1) SundaysandSeasons.com

 Looking at Sunday, September 4

 Lectionary 23, Year C

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(2) What Can You Afford?

 Contributed by Christopher Raiford on Sep 18, 2004

 Scripture: Luke 14:25-33

 Denomination: Lutheran

(3) "Being A Follower of Christ Is More Than A Career.”

 Contributed by Dr. Jerry Morrissey on Sep 2, 2001

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 Denomination: Lutheran

(4) Carrying The Cross Series

 Contributed by Kevin Ruffcorn on Sep 8, 2010

 Scripture: Luke 14:25-33

 Denomination: Lutheran

**Luke 14:25-33**

 Jesus speaks frankly about the costs of discipleship. Those who follow him should

 know from the outset that completing the course of discipleship will finally mean

 renouncing all other allegiances.

 Now large crowds were traveling with [Jesus;] and he turned and said to them,

 “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. Whoever

 does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. For which of you,

 intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see

 whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a

 foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him,

 saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ Or what king,

 going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider

 whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him

 with twenty thousand? If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he

 sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. So therefore, none of you

 can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.”