

Disciples Take Faith Seriously

Luke 14:25-33

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Now large crowds were traveling with him; 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.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

A couple of weeks ago, Liz and I went on our first backpacking trip together up in the Hoh Rainforest. It had been quite a few years since I had been backpacking so I was particularly nervous. We arrived at the trailhead and met up with our friends who had grown up backpacking the trails of the Pacific Northwest. We proceeded to dump everything that both couples had brought onto the ground to sort through what was needed for our several days in the wilderness. How much food should we bring? Maybe an extra bag of trail mix... Did we have enough sleeping bags? I’ll bring another pillow. Will we have enough water? What if we get sick or injured? I’ll bring another first aid kit. How much toilet paper exactly do we need? Liz and I wanted to add more and more so that we would be extra safe and extra comfortable. However, we quickly realized, in our lack of experience,

that we had packed for our own comfort and feeling of security, and not necessarily to have the light pack we would need to make the whole journey. Our packs were really heavy. Would we be able to make it or would we need to turn back before finishing the journey?

Jesus has been traveling to Jerusalem, making a long hike of his own. And as he travels, he has been gathering a crowd. A large crowd. Like a celebrity, everyone wants a photo or an autograph or a simple touch of his cloak. In today's Facebook and Instagram language, he has a lot of followers. People yearning to be close to him for his fame and his power. The sick want to be healed. The hungry want bread. All are trying to get close to him for a simple taste of what he is offering. They are asking for all sorts of things from him, things they anxiously believe they will need to carry in their backpacks on the "hikes of life" they find themselves on.

But Jesus is not looking to become famous or powerful. Jesus does not need their praise. *He knows exactly what is needed for this journey of faith that he is on.* This journey that we are all on. And because of this Jesus offers some rough advice to his followers, and yes that includes us. Jesus turns to them and says, "hate your mother and father, carry the cross, and sell all your possessions... then you can be my follower."

These extreme sayings of Jesus are meant to jar our Christian expectations and beliefs about what exactly is needed for the discipleship journey all of us are on. *What is essential to our faith journey?* Jesus looks and sees what is truly needed. He sees when we have stuffed too much in our backpacks of faith. Stuffed with money or popularity. Stuffed with political power and safety. Our backpack has become too heavy. We have stuffed it full thinking these things will help but in reality they are simply a hindrance to our journey. We yearn for the safety and comfort that these add-ons can bring but they are simply extra weight, holding us back.

Our friends that went hiking with us were very experienced hikers. So as we went through our expansive collection of things I thought we needed, they would say "no more socks" or "you don't need that many flashlights" or "that is too much extra food" again and again and again. I was skeptical and nervous as we began our

voyage into the woods. Could I really make it in the wilderness after taking our friends advice and leaving a whole bunch of things back in our car?

Well, at the end of our first full day of hiking, I remember taking off my pack and thinking, I am so glad that I did not add that extra bag of trail mix or those apples. I am so glad that I did not bring an extra pillow just in case. The weight was heavy enough as is. When I was packing, I was scared and that convinced me that I needed more than I actually did for my safety and my comfort. However our experienced friends strong “no’s” ultimately did not hinder us, in fact, it *freed us* to more thoroughly enjoy the experience. Not having all that extra weight allowed us to have less blisters and more fun! We could lift our gaze from our feet and look out onto the gorgeous river of turquoise glacial water that accompanied us for our whole journey.

Like our experienced backpacking buddies, this harsh-feeling text checks our priorities, helps us discern what to pack along with us for the journey, and ultimately, gives us *freedom*. I believe that is root of what Jesus is saying today: What is essential for our faith journey? Is it our family? Our self-preservation? Is it the status quo or what feels comfortable? Is it our money or our safety?

That is what Jesus is trying to do for us today. Jesus is saying “no” to the things that we try and add-on to our life that will not ultimately save. To be clear, Jesus is happy that we have families that we love or that we have possessions that aid us in experiencing life to its fullest. But they are not essential for our discipleship journey. The point of our discipleship journey is to prioritize Jesus and the things that bring life. Jesus asks us to trust him over everything else that we could trust in our world because being a people of radical and inclusive love will not always be safe or comfortable or easy.

Over the next 12 weeks we are going to be seeing what disciples do. Discipleship is not a spectator sport, it is intentional, it is active. We have created some discipleship journals that have different activities for each of you to take on as you enter into your week. You can pick up this journal at the connection corner after worship. This week your homework will be to take an honest look at your weekly calendar. When we look at where we spend our time, we have a pretty good idea of where our priorities are and what kinds of things we are packing in our journeying backpacks. I want you to honestly fill these calendars out, not in

order to feel shame or guilt, but just a chance to be honest with yourself about what you are prioritizing on your own journey through life.

Once you know where your priorities are, consider praying and talking to God about whether these priorities are in line with following Jesus or if they need some reshaping. Perhaps you can spend less time worrying about making more money and instead serve someone through Family Promise. Perhaps instead of being complete introverts in our homes and safe places, we can ask the neighbor how they are doing. Perhaps you can spend less time watching the news and fuming over the state of the world and turn that passion into action by volunteering at Community House or FISH. When you come back next week you can add your calendars or your thoughts to our “Cloud of Witnesses” at the back. This is a space for us to bring and share our homework so that we can see what disciples do and be encouraged as we take this journey together.

As Liz and I returned to our car at the end of several long days of hiking, we were tired but we felt accomplished. We had pushed ourselves and found that we enjoyed the beauty of the Hoh Rainforest, the mossy trees and the picturesque river. We would not have been able to enjoy this trip as much without the persistent “no’s” from our experienced friends. Sometimes we have to leave the extras so that we can focus on the journey. Leaving that excess frees our minds and our bodies to continue this journey of faith, loving God and neighbor, with freedom rather than fear. Unburden yourself from the cares and worries that do not give life. Jesus is trying to help you lighten your load so that you can travel with him and with us on this journey. Let us move boldly and freely into the world that God is calling us toward!