

No Short Cut

Texts: Genesis 18:1-15 (21:1-7)
Romans 5:1-8 (Series A 2nd Sunday after Pentecost) Ps.116:1-2, 12-19
Matthew 9:35-10:8 (9-23)

"Then He summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority to expel unclean spirits and to cure sickness and disease of every kind" Matthew 10:1

Prayer: Please Read the Gospel Lesson before reading this meditation.

Everything in life that has meaning and value is rooted in God's Grace. In the New Testament, St. Paul begins all his letters by reminding the people to whom he was writing of the Grace of God. "Grace be with you," he says. Jesus came to reveal that Grace to us: to show us what it is; to show us that it is real; to show us that it is available.

But he came also to show us that the way we appropriate that Grace for our lives is through the totality of our response to God. This becomes more and more clear to me as I draw close to Jesus and see Him as the Model of our response to God. In Jesus we see the total response: total obedience to the Father's Will; total acceptance of the Father's love; total dependence for fulfillment on the Father's Resurrection Power.

The legendary Hollywood motion picture executive, Samuel Goldwyn, was one of those people who "saves" everything. Through the years, he refused to allow his staff to throw anything away. His secretary began to get the feeling that she was drowning in the stacks of old telephone messages, letters and memos that were piled everywhere in the office.

Consequently, in desperation, she pleaded with Goldwyn: "Please," she said, "Won't you allow me at least to throw away the memos and letters that are more than ten-years-old?" To which Samuel Goldwyn replied, "All right. But don't forget to make a copy before you do."

In a sense, that is exactly how we see the Grace of God working in today's Gospel Lesson. Jesus, having selected the twelve apostles, is now training them to carry on his ministry to the world. In a few short years He will be gone, but before His seeming death on the Cross he will teach them to imitate him, copy his lifestyle. "The gift you have received, give as a gift," He told his apostles. "*Cure the sick, raise the dead, heal the leprous, expel demons.*"

In other words, "Receive the Father's gift of Grace as I have received it. Respond to the Father's gift of love as I have responded, through my ministry of loving service to the whole world. I am the way and the truth and the life . . . Imitate Me! Copy Me!" "Copy Me!" To copy Jesus is what I as a Christian is being asked to do with my life here on earth.

We are being asked to respond to God totally, as Jesus did; to bring every part of our being into our relationship with God. We are being asked to freely and joyfully say to God, "Lord, I love you with my whole being, in imitation of Christ. I will do **Your Will** in all things, in imitation of Christ.

I will place my complete trust in the Resurrection Power of Your Love to bring me to fulfillment, in imitation of Christ; I will commit my life fully to a ministry of loving service, even unto the least of my brothers and sisters, in imitation of Christ."

Some time ago, oil was discovered in southern Kentucky. Although it was not a major oil strike, nevertheless it caused a flurry of activity and soon an entire area of the countryside was ripped apart as more and more people began drilling. One day, a man who was driving through the area saw a local farmer on the road, walking into town.

He offered the farmer a ride. In the course of their conversation, the man driving the car learned that oil had been discovered on his rider's farm. Said the farmer, "Yes siree! three good wells! they say they'll bring in at least 300 barrels a day." To which the other man replied, "My goodness. What are you going to do with all that money?"

The farmer looked out over the machine-scarred land and said, "I'm gonna buy me a farm that don't have any oil on it." That is a striking story, mainly because it depicts a person who sees something more valuable than the money his oil wells are producing.

Such a person is a rare individual these days. Most of us know what we would do in that farmer's situation: we'd keep on digging for more wells. And, it is precisely in this area of our existence that most of us who are trying to imitate Christ encounter our biggest stumbling block.

The ability to totally respond to God's love and to be totally committed to the Christian ministry of loving service depends, in this materialistic age, largely on a willingness to choose God over mammon. If the materialistic or money aspect of our lives is not included in our response to God, God is being blocked out of every aspect of our lives, whether we realize it or not.

In imitation of Christ we must trust God enough so that even our quest for money and material possessions will be made to harmonize with His Divine Will. In other words, we will want less and give more. We cannot serve God and mammon simultaneously.

A story about the problem lawyers and doctors often encounter with people who seek to obtain free professional advice at parties and other social events. It seems that a certain doctor and a certain lawyer were conversing with each other during a cocktail party. While they were talking, a woman approached the doctor and complained about a sore leg.

The doctor listened, then told her about applying some cold remedies and keeping the leg elevated and take some aspirin, etc. After she had gone, the doctor turned to the lawyer and said, "I think I ought to send her a bill, don't you?" The lawyer said, "Yes, I think you ought to send her a bill." Consequently, the next day, the doctor sent the woman a bill and the lawyer sent the doctor a bill."

Sometimes, when people come looking for spiritual counsel and advice, one feels as though one should send a bill for legal services. They come looking for a loophole in the Gospel. They come wanting someone to read the fine print for them. They come wanting to learn how to keep God out of a certain area of their lives. They come seeking advice on how to leave some portion of their lives unbaptized, uncommitted, unreconciled to God.

They come wanting to strike out certain clauses in their covenant with God. They come wanting to reduce the consideration; they come wanting cheap Grace. But there is no fine print. There is short cut. There is no escape clause. There is no cheap grace.

And that is the reason why Jesus' words to his disciples in today's Gospel Lesson still apply: *"The harvest is good but labourers are scarce"* (Matthew 9:37). The Old Testament Book of Hosea contains a passage in which the prophet is ridiculed. It reads, Let Israel Know it! The Prophet is a fool, the man of the spirit is mad (Hosea 9:7).

Yet, to prophesy for God is our calling. We are called to live our lives in imitation of Christ, the Prophet of Prophets. We are called to be copies of Christ. We are called to be fools for Christ's sake, as St. Paul has written.

To be a "fool for Christ's sake" is the highest title we can aspire to attain. The genuine, serious believer who is willing to stake everything on the love of God in Jesus Christ, is always "mad" in this sense.

It requires a real touch of madness to go that one big step beyond the mediocrity of common sense, to take the great leap of faith into the arms of Jesus. It takes a special kind of foolishness to accept God's Grace in a way that says, "in imitation of Christ, I will respond to your total gift of love to me by giving myself over totally to the Christian ministry of loving service to my earthly brothers and sisters."

In the midst of this Covid-19 pandemic ... *"The harvest is good but labourers are scarce"* this is a great opportunity for us all to pray for one another: *"Cure the sick, raise the dead, heal the leprous, expel demons (of fear)."* Let us encourage one another to live above the fears and uncertainties of our time.

The gift of encouragement is important in our lives. Encouragement is a gift in the home, the workplace, the church—wherever we find ourselves. We can come alongside others and be there for one another. We can listen, comfort, console, affirm. It's a way of living out the command to love one another.

Let all take this time to pray, encourage and call one another in the household of faith and ALL nurses, doctors, truck drivers, essential workers etc. They're the ones who were there when you thought you'd never laugh again. They were the ones who listened to you; whereas others just talked. Then ask yourself, "When was the last time I encouraged someone?" It's not difficult, and the people you encourage are so blessed by it.

Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:

- Great Is Thy Faithfulness # 733
- O Jesus, Joy of Loving # 658
- O Zion, Hast # 668

**To Love is Nothing....
To Be Loved is Something....
To Love and Be Loved is Everything
Amen.**