

The Cost Of Discipleship

Texts: Jeremiah 18:1-11

Philemon 1-12 (Series C. 13th Sunday after Pentecost) Ps. 139:1-6, 13-18

Luke 14:25-33

"Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple ... whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:27,33).

Let us pray:

In the film *"The River,"* by Jean Renoir, there is a section where a crippled American soldier is outraged over the cross he has been given to bear. In his suffering, he asks a Hindu woman if there is anything he can do to make life meaningful. She replies in a single word: *"Consent!"* In other words, *"Be!"*

That is what Jesus is telling us in today's Gospel Lesson: *"Whoever does not bear his / her own cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple ... whoever of you does not renounce all that he /she has cannot be My disciple"* (Lk. 14:27,33).

If we want to be the uniquely beautiful people God made us to be, then renounce our cold, fear-driven, achievement-oriented, undistinguished self and follow Me, Jesus is telling us. If we want to make our life worthwhile, take up our cross and follow me, Jesus is telling us.

When we turn our attention to the Gospel of Luke, we can understand why the French scholar, Ernst Renan, described it as *"the most beautiful book in the world."* It is beautiful not only because of Luke's style of writing which is outstanding, but even more because of the story that is told.

The Gospel of Luke is essentially a love story or God's love letter to us. As you delve into the love story, we discover that we are the one who is loved. And, God, the Holy God, is the great Lover. Beginning with the nativity narratives, Luke is telling us that God is coming in this little Child to reveal God's Love for us.

Then as we move into the ministry of Jesus, the centerpiece is the story of the *"Prodigal Son"* which is all about how much the Father loves *us* and is waiting for us to come home.

Or if we are already home, He is waiting for us to appreciate our life with God the Father. This same basic theme runs right through to the crucifixion. As the events of the passion story unfold one-by-one, we understand that God is acting in this way in order to show us how much he loves us.

Even in his death agony Jesus remembers the thief hanging next to him. And there is a word of forgiveness and a word of love for that thief. Jesus looks down at those who are killing him and says "*Father, forgive them.*" In the crucifixion story -- God's Word of Love is the theme.

I believe that the whole Gospel message tells us that we all have been created for life with God, we belong to God. We are like branches that need to be nourished by the main vine. And if we become detached we begin to wither and die. We cannot be who we're supposed to be on our own. But we try. Oh how we try to be without God! God cries out: *Oh Jerusalem, oh Jerusalem how I wish to gather you as hen gathers her chicks, but you will not.*

Some of us try to do it by making things our "security" our number one priority. There is nothing wrong with having possessions, but the danger for most of us is we tend to put all our trust in them to give our life meaning! We say to our self if I have this or that then I will be happy!

And it never works. It gives us a temporary sense of security but it's always temporary and, ultimately, self-defeating. Some of us try to do it by human made avenues, and we experience a temporary high, but it's always temporary -- and then comes the crash.

The only power that is great enough to break through that ego-structure, and bring us to freedom, and frees us from the bondage of self is the power of God in Jesus Christ, especially in the *Cross*.

We need absolutely to experience the power of God's Love in order to discover our true worth as human beings. Apart from God, we cannot be our true self. Apart from God we cannot give our *consent* to the good life that makes everything meaningful and worthwhile.

God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us," Paul writes. This will become real to us only to the degree that we open up our heart or our inner-space by renouncing whatever it is in our life that will not allow God's Love to break through our ego-structure. When we let go in this way, God is there, and life will never be the same.

I would like to share a true story in nut shell of what Jesus is teaching us this morning. The story is about the late Bishop Fulton J. Sheen who was once asked to describe his "*Most Inspiring Moment.*" This is what he wrote:

"A few years ago he said, I visited a leper colony in Africa. I brought with me 500 small silver crucifixes to give to each victim of the dread disease. The first leper who came up to me had only a stump of his left arm. The right arm and hand were full of those open sores of leprosy. I held the crucifix a few inches above that hand and let it drop into the palm.

At that moment there were 501 lepers in the camp, and the most leprous of them all was myself. I had taken the symbol of redemption, of Divine Love for man, of the humiliation of Divinity into our fallen human nature, and had refused to identify myself with all that that symbol implied.

It is so easy to love humanity in general but so difficult sometimes to love a particular man. It is easy to help the lepers, but when one meets a particular leper, then a special effort is required.

Seeing myself in the full shame of refusing to identify myself with this victim, I looked at the crucifix in the rotten mass of his hand and realized that I, too, must become one with suffering humanity. Then I pressed my hand to his hand with the symbol of love between us and continued to do it for the other 499 lepers."

" *Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit,*" Jesus said on the Cross. "Whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be My disciple," Jesus is saying to us now. God is waiting to receive us in love. "Father into your hands we commit our body, mind, and spirit."

Last week Paul told us to be content with what we have and in Luke, Jesus was telling us how not to exalt ourselves. I think there is much the same in this week. A recurring theme of Scripture is not getting caught up in earthly delights or gathering wealth or possessions but rather to focus on the goal of everlasting life in Christ.

This is a life-calling and there is a price. Some days we'll feel blessings and other days will seem like curses. We'll have many wrong turns and unholy moments but if our intent is true, and we keep turning back to Christ, we will be made whole and sanctified when we arrive at our ultimate destination.

We are called to a life that continues to build on Christ as our One Foundation, not merely constructing a tower to enjoy the view. There are no discount tickets for this ride, the cost is the full price of admission to our life in God forever.

It is in God's love that we discover our *true security* and *our true hope* and *our true self* and *our true rescue* from the fear of death. The more we trust in God to make our life meaningful, the more effective our deeds are in the long run, for they come out of our true self -- our true center where God is nurturing and God is healing and God is empowering us to be men and women for others. Jesus took up His Cross completely as the "Man For Others." Let us take our cross and follow Him!
Amen.

Let us pray: O God of Blessings and Curses, You offer us a choice for life through the blessing of carrying of Christ's Cross as His willing prisoners of and for love, or the curse of throwing our souls like chaff into the winds of the wicked. Turn us toward You, in the time we each have, to stand upright in Your Knowing Presence sharing our faith with joy. We ask through Jesus, our Redeemer Christ; and the Holy Spirit, our Source of Wisdom; who together with You are our One God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Prayer concerns: *Shirley Walker, Hanne Bourgeoise, Sven Berg, Astrid Hylland, Ellen Eriksen, Ellen Dahal-Lanteigne, Wilhelmina Tiemersma, Soo Young, Susan and Mark, Ann Jensen, Tabita Waco, Carl, Samantha, Athena, Lorenz Lichtenberger & Glenn Cleaver. May they find solace in the love and grace of God. The dire tension between Russia and Ukraine, Protectors at various places in our world, Covid -19 patients, essential and Frontline workers, finally Families of departed souls in recent weeks and months.*

Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:

- **I Heard the voice of Jesus Say # 611**
- **Will You Come and Follow Me # 798**
- **Jesus, I have Promised # 810**

Birthdays

n/a

Wedding Anniversary

n/a

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