Sermon 09-08-19

Are You Sure You Wish to Follow Me? -- Jesus

Luke 14:25-33

**Sermon Starter**

I know it was a couple months back, but how many of you watched the 4th of July Parade? I know several of you did because as I semi-madly dashed to Family Foods before the 11 a.m. step-off, not once but twice, I noticed a few you securely settled in your shady spot along the parade route.

How many of you were in the parade? **GRAPHIC: I know a few of you were. It was warm on the 4th, and although the route doesn’t look that long, when you have to multi-task, play an instrument, throw candy, or wave with a smile on your face on a warm day, that short distance can feel like 10 miles if you have to walk the route. Those that rode had it comfortable.**

Did any of you follow behind the parade once it passed your location? Did you hustle off to the park to catch up with those marching in the parade?

We love parades, don’t we? We also love to gather to listen to music at a concert, go to fairs, farmers markets, sporting events, and we even get involved in things political, caucuses, rallies, and meet-n-greets. We enjoy being part of a group.

**Are You Sure You Wish to Follow Me?**

In our scripture lesson this morning we hear Jesus is on a journey. He is on his way to Jerusalem, but what is the nature of this journey? Is it a funeral procession? Apparently, only Jesus has seriously faced the issue of his death. The twelve, his disciples, certainly have not grasped it yet.

Is it a march? Very likely some think so, investing a good deal of emotion in imagining the projected clash: Galilee versus Jerusalem, peasants versus power, laity versus clergy, Jews versus Romans, Jesus versus the establishment.[[1]](#endnote-1) Remember, there are even those in the group of disciples that think Jesus is going to restore the Kingdom of Israel. One of the twelve is Simon the Zealot, so named either because of his previous association with a band of extremists by the same name, or he was very zealous for the law.[[2]](#endnote-2)

Is it a parade? Obviously, this crowd thinks so, oblivious to any conflict, any price to pay, any cross to bear. The crowds swell; everybody loves a parade. Our turnout on the 4th is proof of that. What does Jesus have to say to these hasty volunteers?

**Think About What You Are Doing**

This crowd is following him, like so many other crowds do around Jesus in the Galilee and beyond. Jesus is not calling on them to be disciples. There is no evangelism here. However, once the stage is set, that is, once we know that Jesus is on the move and there is a large crowd following him, we hear the theme in this portion of Luke’s Gospel: “Whoever does not … cannot be my disciple” (v. 26, 27, 33). Jesus is saying what it is going to cost to become his disciple.

This is one of the most disturbing passages in scripture and Jesus lays out the theme in three different verses beginning with **GRAPHIC: verse 26: “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.”**

Wow! Doesn’t this go against all the teaching we hear in the Bible, not only from Jesus but also from Paul and James? Aren’t we called to love, care for, and nourish our families and others? With this kind of attitude, how can anyone become a disciple of Jesus?

The key to this verse is the word hate. **GRAPHIC: When we think of hate, what comes to mind? Some words that come to mind might be words like loathe, dislike, abhor, detest, scorn, despise, or disdain.[[3]](#endnote-3)**  We can probably add a few more to that list as well. Because of those words we associate with the word hate this verse is difficult for us to accept.

However, in Jesus time, **GRAPHIC: the Semitic expression “to hate” means to turn away from or to detach oneself from something.** There was no hostility or anger associated with the word. When we say, “I hate you,” we do not see any detachment or turning away. We see detest, dislike, despise and the like. And to hate one’s own life is not a call for self-loathing, to regard oneself as a worm, or to toss ourselves on the trash heap of the world. We have not been given any right to judge ourselves.

Again, let’s remember the context in which we hear these words. Who were the disciples? They were an itinerant band of followers of Jesus. Discipleship required a willingness to leave home and family and travel with minimal provisions from village to village. Jesus disciples turned away, they detached themselves from, they “hated” the life they lived to follow Jesus.

What our Lord is saying in our passage this morning is that discipleship must take priority even over some of the most sacred relationships. There is no duty higher than commitment to Jesus and being a disciple.[[4]](#endnote-4) True story. When Kelley and I were still dating, we were talking about relationships. I told her that the most important person in my life was Jesus Christ, she was second, and my family was third. Shocking, yes, but knowing where the Lord is in our lives drives everything else.

A further difficulty arises in the very next verse, where Jesus demands, **GRAPHIC: “Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”** It is a version of what was written earlier in Luke 9:23, **GRAPHIC: “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.”** Did you catch the subtle difference?

In Luke 9, we find the word daily, **GRAPHIC: “…take up their cross daily and follow me.”**  It is only used in this verse in Luke’s Gospel. Inserting the word daily shifts the emphasis from martyrdom to sacrificial living.[[5]](#endnote-5) Taking up a cross daily is a voluntary act. It is something a person has chosen to do. Daily does not make it a one-time event, it is every day. To take up one’s cross falls in line with our previous discussion of the word “hate.” To take up a cross is to deny self, or to turn away from or detach oneself from something, all the while serving God.[[6]](#endnote-6)

By the way, bearing a cross has nothing to do with chronic illness, painful physical conditions, or trying family relationships. Instead, it is what we do voluntarily because of our commitment to Jesus Christ. Cross bearing requires deliberate sacrifice and exposure to risk and ridicule in order to follow Jesus. This commitment is not just a way of life. It is a commitment to a person. A disciple follows another person and learns a new way of life.

These are harsh words, even for the modern Christian community to hear. We know where

Jesus’ way leads. However, the words of Jesus are telling us bluntly that discipleship costs. It will cost us everything!

**Are You Willing to Stay with Me the All the Way?**

Turn the clock back to the beginning of the church as we know it. In the Acts of the Apostles we read that those early believers shared everything. They sold what they had and pooled the funds to help everyone. **GRAPHIC: In fact, scripture tells us the story of two who withheld some of the profits they made from selling some land, Ananias and Sapphira.** After being confronted by Peter and denying keeping a portion of the proceeds from the sale of their land, they dropped over dead. Afterwards, a great fear seized the whole church and all who heard of these things.

**Graphic: Rodney S. Sadler, Jr., tells of a time he was attending a church in Charlotte, North Carolina,** when the pastor offered the challenge of discipleship to his congregation. “If you cannot heed this call, then you ought to renounce your baptism.” The pastor’s words shook all of us that day, Sadler says, because it made all of us aware of our shortcomings. It brought us to the realization that our lack of action is equal to relinquishing our faith.[[7]](#endnote-7)

Those are some potent words. But what does it take to follow Jesus? What does it look like to follow Jesus? In his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer talks about cheap grace. **GRAPHIC: He says, “Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.**”[[8]](#endnote-8)

The cost of discipleship looks different for each of us. For some people, a redirection of time and energy is required, for others a change in personal relationships, a change in vocation, or a commitment of financial resources, but for each person the cost of discipleship is all consuming.

Let’s look at Kelley and I, for example. Remember what I said a bit ago about relationships? Jesus is first. However, it doesn’t stop there.

United Methodist clergy (elders and associate members) agree to be a part of the itineracy of the church. Unlike our Lutheran, Presbyterian, and UCC brothers and sisters where the local church body interviews and selects their pastor, the Bishop of the Annual Conference assigns UMC pastors to the church they will serve - annually. When I came to Tipton, that meeting on April 18th with the SPRC was not an interview, it was an introduction of your new pastor.

In my previous conference, the Bishop was known for moving the clergy of her Annual Conference. In a four-year period, she moved all but 3 clergy in the Cal-Pac Conference, and moved one-third of the clergy in the CA-Nev Conference each of the two-years I was there, most of it involuntarily. We lived on pins and needles every Feb-June to see if we would be moving or not. But we are answering God’s call.

When I answered God’s call to come to Iowa, our whole world changed. We left a place we called home. I grew up in CA and Kelley lived there for 32 years. We left friends and family. When we moved to Iowa, we sold the house we had. Not all churches have parsonages in CA, like so many churches do here in Iowa. There are many clergy in our denomination who do not own property and only when they retire will they become homeowners. Others, and I know a few, become absentee landlords, thinking they will one day return to the home they had upon retirement. Not many do. But again, we are answering God’s call.

Licensed Local Pastors, which is what I was before becoming an Associate Member, commit to Licensing School and then five or more years of Course of Study during the summer. By the way, that does not include the six-months of prep work each year preparing for summer classes, reading textbooks and writing papers. We heard and answered God’s call.

There is a practical side to Jesus’ instructions. **GRAPHIC: He let his disciples and us know that the road he is walking is not without its sacrifices.** To follow him, Jesus is saying, is not without its heavy demands, and to carry the cross is not without its real costs.

A complete change in priorities is required of all would be disciples. **GRAPHIC: No part-time disciples are needed.** No partial commitments are accepted. **GRAPHIC: Do we qualify for the position?** I am still wondering if I do.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. Craddock, Fred B., *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, “Luke”* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 181 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Comfort, Philip & Elwell, Walter A., *The Complete Book of Who’s Who in the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2004), 565 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. McCutcheon, Marc, *Roget’s Super Thesaurus, 3rd Ed.,* (Cincinnati, OH: Writer’s Digest Books, 2003), 282 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Culpepper, R. Alan, & O’Day, Gail R, *The New Interpreter’s Bible, Volume IX, Luke/John* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 292 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Craddock, *“Luke*,” 130 [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Sadler, Rodney S., Jr., “Luke 14:25-33 Exegetical Perspective” contained in Bartlett, David L. & Taylor, Barbara Brown, Editors, *Feasting on the Word, Year C Volume 4* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 49 [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Rowell, Edward K., *1001 Quotes, Illustrations & Humorous Stories for Preachers, Teachers & Writers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 81 [↑](#endnote-ref-8)