

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, June 25, 2017
Christ Episcopal Church, La Crosse, Wisconsin
The Rev. Canon Patrick P. Augustine, Rector
Matthew 10: 24-39

The Cost of Discipleship

This week and for the next two weeks, the important theological theme of discipleship emerges in Matthew. The difficulty in preaching today's text is not the complexity of its concept, but the seeming disconnect between the palpable threats of the world it displays and the "safe" world most of us inhabit.

Following Jesus means a life on the move, a life risking one's security - both physical and emotional - for the sake of the Gospel. The Christian refugees from Syria, Iraq, Sudan and Pakistan can read this text this morning and say it is about them. When in the early church this Gospel was being shared, the disciples of Jesus were aware of the persecution, opposition and difficulties in following Jesus. It is important to note that discipleship includes daily learning through our association with Jesus through a study of Holy Scripture, prayer and worship.

One way of looking at this text is that the call of Christ is no easy matter. What Jesus calls us to be is not pleasant, it is not easy, it should not be done without serious contemplation. We do to the cause of Christ a great disservice if we present the Christian life as the easy road. Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls this idea cheap grace, which is the deadly enemy of our Church. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal repentance. Cheap grace is grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate. Following Jesus is costly, it is no easy thing to deny yourself and carry the cross.

When we are called to follow Jesus it is a call to costly grace because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son "You were bought at a price," and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us.

Some of us wonder, "Am I worthy to be a disciple of Jesus? Do I have the gifts of ministry to follow Jesus?" Martin Luther was right: "God can carve the rotten

wood and ride the lame horse." Jesus chose just such people: fishermen and a tax collector, known as sinners and zealots. They were not particularly part of the religious establishment. Jesus took these ordinary earthen vessels and filled them with his grace and gave them power to bring glory and honor to God.

I do not know to what Jesus is calling you to serve him in this community. It may be that you are called to organize or to assist in carrying out the church's mission of Christ in our local community. It can be working in a homeless shelter, or working on Tuesday morning at Salvation Army making sandwiches and putting together lunch bags for needy children. Perhaps, you wish to help your rector to support the education of children in Garissa, Kenya, Pakistan and South Sudan. It may be that you are being called to bring friends and neighbors to worship on Sunday morning. We may stand up against racism or be advocate for the poor. We can visit the sick and lonely as pastoral care givers. Whatever your calling it will be costly, but it will be gracious. You will experience God's empowering hand as you seek to fulfill what you have discerned to be God's calling in your life.

There are four things you will experience to know God is supporting you to follow Jesus as a disciple:

First: The Holy Spirit will surely be present and never will abandon you.

Second: You will come to recognize that your suffering is not wasted, but is a testimony to faith.

Third: Even in the midst of our hardships you will know that nothing can eradicate the gospel or destroy God's loving, watchful care over the faithful.

Fourth: While family disruption in some cases will surely take place, Jesus is not against the family, rather, there will be times when allegiance to Jesus causes a crisis of loyalty and forces a decision.¹

Last year in our Thursday Bible study class we studied a book, *Seeking Allah Finding Jesus* by Nabeel Qureshi. In this book we learned the testimony of a young Muslim man who belonged to a devout Muslim family from Pakistan. He decided to accept Jesus as his Lord and Savior, so his family immediately severed all relations with him.

¹ David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown, Editors, *Feasting on the Word*, WJK, 2011, Pp. 164-169.

In this passage of the Gospel Jesus is conveying loudly and clearly to his disciples, that what matters is allegiance to him. Allegiance to Jesus must come at the top of every priority list. We can see, as the story unwinds, how difficult this was even for those who knew him personally. For example: Peter denied him, Judas betrayed him, the rest all ran away and hid. But the challenge remains - embracing everything, demanding everything, offering everything, and promising everything. It is this power of the love of God which enables us to make a commitment to love and to serve Christ as his faithful followers.

I have decided to follow Jesus
No turning back, no turning back
The world behind me
The cross before me
No turning back, no turning back.
Amen.