

PROPER 18, PENTECOST 13, YEAR C, SEPTEMBER 4, 2022

In our reading from Luke's gospel this morning Jesus names some uncomfortable truths about what it means to be a disciple. When it comes to the life of faith, we want to have our cake and eat it, too. But we can't. We want to embrace a Christianity that doesn't involve costly choices. We want to drift along as we always have. We want to experience Jesus the healer, Jesus the savior, Jesus the friend — but not so much Jesus the radical, counter-cultural prophet who barges into our lives and asks the impudent, unbearable question: "Are you really a disciple or a wanna be?!"

"None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all of your possessions," Jesus tells a large crowd in our reading. "Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." If those two warnings aren't dire enough, he issues a third — a real zinger: "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even life itself, cannot be my disciple."

You have to hand it to Jesus: he believes in truth-in-advertising. He doesn't sugarcoat his message in order to sell it. He doesn't cut corners, and he doesn't soften the blow. He tells it like it is. And how is it?

What it comes down to is that Jesus' message is all about choices. I think a lot of people who were thinking about following Jesus were faced with the painful choice of losing what was familiar to them and the fear of what they would face by accepting a new way of life. They were being called to leave their old ways and open themselves to a new way of thinking which was so different from what they were leaving behind. This would take a lot of faith, courage and commitment and a lot of hard choices to be able to do this. It is the same choices that we have to make today.

This is what Jesus was forcefully saying to them in the Gospel today when he says you have to hate your immediate family and that none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions. Really! Hate! Actually, the word "hate" doesn't quite grasp the meaning of what is being said. The original Greek word used here is from the root word, *miseo*. *Miseo* literally means to regard with less affection, less attached too, to love less, or to esteem less. It doesn't mean animosity, ill will, or revenge, which our English word, "hate," suggests. *Miseo* doesn't mean that the object is detestable or repugnant. It just means that by comparison, someone or something is less important than someone or something else.

So, when Jesus says whoever does not hate it is more like saying whoever does not let go or move beyond. Jesus is saying we have to go beyond our present relationships such as family, because the new reality to which we are being called includes all people, all of humanity. In this new life Jesus calls us to you cannot confine your love to family or within tribal boundaries. Instead, Jesus' love and compassion must be expressed to all and especially those in need. The immediate family represents the old way — the new Jesus way is to see everyone as family. And when it comes to possessions, that is the old way of determining your importance. The more you had, the more important you were. Jesus is calling us to realize that possessions do not define who you are or your importance. In the kingdom of God everyone is important.

So, what we have here is Jesus calling people away from the limitations of their former way of looking at things, the way they emphasized their own people and closing their doors on others, the restrictions that their present religion with its rules and

regulations placed on them, their attempt to confine and define God who is really indefinable, and their way of limiting God's love and activity instead of opening themselves to a new consciousness. We still do this today.

Jesus was and is offering new life and a new vision of an expansive humanity. In every generation Jesus calls us to this new way of thinking but more often we prefer the old ways instead of making some hard choices.

To some extent making choices is what life is all about. Our lives are a series of choices in which we have to find meaning in each one of them. No matter how old we are we are always facing new demands regarding choices - relational demands, economic demands, political demands. And it doesn't stop there.

Our faith life is also a continual process of choices and new beginnings. Our faith life should always push us further into the mystery of God rather than adhering to beliefs that restrict growth. A retired bishop once said "The older I get the more deeply I believe but the less beliefs I have." In essence he was indicating that our faith needs to go beyond our formal religious practices and statement of beliefs. In fact, as we have seen, our formal religious practices can sometimes be a hindrance to our relationship with God. Christianity, after all, is rooted not in doctrine formulas but in the person of Jesus Christ.

It is oftentimes amazing how we can get caught up in so many trivial issues that we can't see the broader picture and recognize that those things don't matter one iota in being a disciple. In order to be his disciple we have to value all that we hold dear a little less; what you believe about the Eucharist, where an altar stands, what liturgy you are using mean absolutely nothing when it comes to being a disciple. None of that marks God's Kingdom; rather, it is marked by the kind of love for all (family included) that requires a handing over of oneself for the good of the other. This is the sales pitch of the Gospel!

Jesus calls us to love one another. Everything else is trivial. We have become too caught up in rules and rituals that keep people out, even ourselves, so that, in many respects, we are crucifying Jesus over and over again when we don't live up to what he commanded us to do. Jesus was a radical not this quiet, friendly, teddy bear kind of person we've turned him into.

Today, we face changes and challenges about the future of the church. We can point to secularism and sports and so many things we believe have stopped people from coming to church because it's a lot easier than looking at the church itself and how far we have forgotten how to be a true disciple. How do we live the gospel daily? In reassessing what is most important to us, we may find that we have to walk away from ideas and the things we've done in the past that we hold so dear that are a hindrance to the gospel. That's what it means to take up your cross.

The true gospel of Jesus Christ tells us it is more important to think of others, to include others, to give to others, to better the lives of others than to worry only about yourself and your immediate family. That is the call of Jesus to all of us. It's about choices, hard choices.

Ask yourselves this question, if Jesus were here today who would he be gathering with, eating with, railing against for their inability to recognize who the kingdom of God includes and what God wants from us? I daresay we would all be surprised that he would probably be pointing his finger at the church for caring more about the institution than

being a bona fide disciple. Who is my neighbor? What are we willing to give up? Who, besides my family do I care for?

I believe Jesus' call to discipleship means the willingness to wrestle with these large questions, to become a community of questioners. Jesus calls us to question how we may create a community of kindness and compassion that will bring healing to our troubled world.

Bottom line, the cost of discipleship is hard choices. We are called to be followers, not admirers, of Jesus Christ. Are we willing to reorder our priorities, and make changes in our lives. It takes courage to move forward – to rethink everything you believe in yet it can continue to be an exciting journey of faith and that is the cost of discipleship. The question is, are we willing to answer this call? Amen.