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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 18C)

September 4, 2016

Text: Luke 14:25–35

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I'm all in favor of memorizing the Bible. The more the better. May God's Word dwell deep and richly in our hearts, minds, and emotions. But I do think that many of the Bible memorization programs are a bit skewed. Most of the verses that people memorize are positive ones, the blessings and the promises. You know, the "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13) and "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28) and "The joy of the Lord is your strength" (Neh. 8:10) type Bible passages. Those are great Bible verses. And yes, we should memorize them.

But what about the "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple" (vs. 26) and "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple" (vs. 27) and "So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple" (vs. 33) type passages? I don't often see those kinds of Bible verses on memory cards and the like.

The three passages I just quoted are from today's gospel reading. They are words of the Lord Jesus Christ. The same Jesus who says "For God so loved the world..." also says if you do not hate all normal, natural, earthly relationships and take up your own death and renounce all that you possess, you cannot be His disciple! Notice the emphatic, absolutists language Jesus uses. You "cannot be my disciple." Three times in vs. 26, 27, 33.

As Biblical Christians, we must be committed to all of Scripture. We can't pick and choose, not if we are serious in our conviction that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God that is the only source and authority for doctrine and faith.

And we can't even make the argument that those absolute commitment statements are only intended for the apostles. Look at vs. 25, "Now great crowds accompanied Jesus,

and he turned and said to them.” This is Jesus’ preaching to the multitudes! This message applies to every man, woman, or child who wants to follow Jesus. And when making those absolute commitment statements, Jesus uses the broadest, most generalized language possible: “If anyone...” (vs. 26) and “Whoever” (vs. 27) and “any one of you” (vs. 33). What Jesus teaches in today’s gospel reading is of utmost important. We baptized Christians need to heed our Lord’s words all the more carefully. Jesus said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear” (vs. 35). May the God the Father by His Holy Spirit grant us open ears and willing hearts to hear and live according to our Lord’s words.

We begin in vs. 26, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.” Those are jarring, surprising words. We are to hate our closest, family relationship? Our very selves?

Well, yes. Compared to our love and devotion to God everything is an infinitely distant second. In catechism class we learn that the meaning of the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment, “You shall have no other gods” is “to fear, love, and trust in God above all things.” All things include family and friends, possessions and power, life and liberty. All other relationships must be renounced, including your very own life, or you “cannot be my disciple” (vs. 26). As Christians, we are called by God to love and serve our families. A multitude of Bible passages can be cited to demonstrate this divine obligation. But our love and devotion to family must always be in subjection to our highest of all loves, love for God.

The Lord continues in the next verse (vs. 27), “Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.” The shocking nature of this single sentence is lost on us. The Roman world knew what “bearing your own cross” meant. Slow agonizing suffering and death. And Jesus says unless you take up the cross, “you cannot be my disciple.” The Christian life is one of daily dying to yourself through repentance, turning away from sin and following Jesus as Lord no matter where He leads. You cannot have Jesus without the cross daily in your life.

Jesus provides an illustration to clarify these hard saying (vs. 28–30). Before someone builds a tower, he must consider carefully his plans. Does he have enough money, time, and resources to see the project to completion? Are there enough workers? Can supplies be obtained? These things must be considered before building lest he fail in completing the task and suffer shame and ridicule (vs. 29).

Jesus continues....discipleship is like a king on the verge of war with another country (vs. 31–32). The wise and faithful king will assess the situation carefully. I have 10,000 men. My enemy has 20,000. Can I defeat him under those circumstances? Yes, then proceed. No, seek terms of peace.

To follow Jesus, to be His disciple, requires one to count the costs of discipleship. Do you have the resources to follow Jesus knowing that He calls you to renounce yourself, your relationships, and your possessions? The practical outworking of Jesus' teaching is limitless. It may mean that you have to say no to certain activities because it conflicts with your Christian discipleship. It may mean being denied certain professional opportunities because the job requirements prevent you from serving Jesus. It may mean a life of less money and material comforts. "So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple" (vs. 33).

Do we ever stop and ask ourselves, "Can I do this activity, and follow Jesus? Can I take this particular job, and follow Jesus? Am I able to pursue this college degree and remain faithful to the Lord of life? Can I marry this person and serve Jesus? Should I watch these kinds of movies, read this genre of books, or listen to this music and follow Jesus with a clean and pure conscience?" Countless examples could be given. Following Jesus includes saying goodbye to control of your life; dying to yourself daily through repentance and faith, trusting that Jesus will do you good unto eternal salvation regardless of what happens in the here and now.

Finally, Christian discipleship is compared to salt in vs. 34–35. For us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, salt is primarily used for flavoring. But in the ancient world, salt was a necessary food preservative. If, however, it became contaminated with dirt and grime, it ceased to be good and must be thrown out. Devotion to Jesus can't be mixed. If family ties, the burden of bearing Jesus' cross, and earthly possession hinder people from becoming and remaining believers, then they have become like corrupted salt, deserving to be thrown out (A.A. Just, p. 583).

Do we have ears to hear (vs. 35) what Jesus is saying? His call to discipleship follows the same path of renunciation and self-denial that He Himself followed. The cost of discipleship is indeed great. But the gift of eternal life He secures for us and all His disciples is greater than any and all costs combined.

Jesus never asks anything of His people that He Himself has not already secured for us. We need to hear this clearly today. Jesus Himself lived according to His own

teaching. In becoming man, Jesus denied Himself the divine glory that is rightly His; He renounced the eternal bliss with His Father and the Holy Spirit in order to become God's Lamb who takes away the sins of the world. In His obedience to His heavenly Father, the Son of God takes up a real Roman cross and all the flogging that came with it, in order to secure for Himself a holy people, a holy family that seeks to follow Him back to the realms of glory and truth. Jesus forsook the riches of glory to take on the form of a servant. He renounced relationships, life, and possessions in order to save His people. Jesus never asks anything of His people that He Himself has not already secured for us.

Do we have ears to hear this great news? The path of discipleship is one of renunciation and striving after God's kingdom. Jesus has already walked this very path and cleared the way so that we join Him in His kingdom in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. We die with Christ in daily repentance in order to live with Him by faith in the power of His resurrection.

Leave today in the refreshing, resurrection life of Jesus. Love your family and friends heartily. Live well and joyously. Use your possessions as gifts of God and in service to God and neighbor. Jesus leads you in your discipleship from death to life, from poverty to riches, from hell to heaven, from sadness to eternal joy. He withholds no good and saving gift. Follow Jesus.

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

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.