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TRINITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

SEPTEMBER 8, 2019

LUKE 14:25-35

“A DISCIPLESHIP THAT ENDURES”

*The main point of this sermon is that our discipleship endures when the priority of our lives is a complete dependence on the grace of Christ.*

**Invitation of Discipleship**

When you read the Gospels and examine the life of Jesus, one of the things you quickly notice is that Jesus attracted a crowd wherever he went. It was a crowd that tracked Jesus down when he retreated into a deserted place (Lk. 4:42). It was a crowd that forced a group of friends to tear the roof off a house, so they could bring their paralyzed friend to Jesus (Lk. 5:19). Jesus’ mother and brothers couldn’t reach him once because of a crowd (Lk. 8:19). In our passage this morning, we’re told “large crowds” were traveling with him.

What’s so important about all this? The point the Gospel writers want us to understand is that Jesus was radically accessible. Often, we do everything in our power to avoid the crowds but not Jesus. No one was barred from his presence. And what we notice is that no one’s moral fitness gave them the right to approach Jesus. And conversely, no one’s moral unfitness kept them from Jesus.

And so, when it comes to discipleship, we never earn or lose the right to follow Jesus. He is freely available. That’s why he was always among the crowds – anyone was able to approach him. The issue was never that Jesus kept his distance from people. He ate with Pharisees and prostitutes. The religious authorities and the religious outcasts. The issue, the stumbling block for so many, even today, is that Jesus determines the way we come to him and follow him. No one is excluded, but at the same time no one is exempt from the terms Jesus sets. Jesus, at the same time, is both radically accessible and radically narrow.

And what’s hard for us is that those things are opposites in our mind. We think that to be open means getting rid of any demands or conditions or standards. And on the other hand, we think that the only way to maintain any standards is to close ourselves off and withdraw from the crowds. But isn’t it interesting that in Jesus these seemingly opposite things are brought into perfect harmony? And the reason for that is that all of us need the same thing in order to follow Jesus. We are all required to pass through the same narrow door. You could put like this, we all have the same condition or sickness, and if we’re going to be disciples, we need the same prescription. And what Jesus prescribes is a new identity that is based squarely on him.

**Identity of Discipleship**

This is what Jesus is driving at, in verse 26, when he says, “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.” It’s shocking language, isn’t it? Jesus tells us to love our enemies, and here he is telling us we must *hate* our most intimate family relationships. How does that fit together?

We need to understand how the family functioned in the ancient world. More so than today, where we have much more freedom, opportunity, and mobility, one’s family in the ancient world determined nearly everything about you. It determined your social status and most often your vocation. Religious identity was inseparable from one’s family. Families were economically interdependent. You see, one’s family network was essentially one’s identity.

And when Jesus says we must *hate* this network, he isn’t talking about harboring hostile feelings toward family members. What Jesus is saying is that when we come to him, we cannot bring along competing, rival identities that vie to be first. At the heart of it, Jesus is saying you cannot have multiple masters in your life (cf. Matt. 6:24). It doesn’t work. It spiritually tears you apart trying to serve multiple masters. It creates all sorts of moral confusion and dysfunction. It ruins your relationships. It leads to all sorts of disastrous decisions.

What Jesus is saying here about discipleship is that a disciple is someone who prioritizes Christ to such an extent that all our relationships *might* look like hatred to some.

Just think how others would react to our financial decisions if we really grasped what Jesus taught about money. How different would we look if we really took to heart what Jesus said about accumulating possessions? Or about humility? Anger? Lust? Or about pursuing holiness and obedience in life? Or about forgiving our enemies and blessing those who curse us?

You see, Jesus knows that the problem with rival identities is they will always keep us a safe distance from the cross. Jesus is saying the only way you’ll ever carry the cross is by releasing your insistence to determine who you are and what you are about apart from him. And that’s the way to destroy a life.

The whole idea about carrying the cross is fully embracing the life that is shaped and determined by Jesus. And if you’ve ever seen a picture of Christ carrying the cross, you’ll know that it takes every bit of someone to shoulder that load. There’s no room to drag anything else along.

We see this through Paul. At the end of Galatians, he writes, “May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal. 6:14). Paul’s point is that he put to death the normal pursuits and ways of the world. He was no longer alive to those things. He no longer celebrated or boasted of anything except Christ. He was remade by Christ, and through Christ he came alive to serve and minister to the world.

What Jesus wants this large crowd to know is that to follow him means far more than simply observing and watching Jesus from a distance. It means more than just being among the crowd of onlookers. It means a total reorientation to the self and to every relationship we possess. That’s why Jesus says to take stock and assess whether this is something you can undertake.

**Inventory of Discipleship**

The two mini-parables in verses 28-32 are about a builder and a king sitting down and determining whether they have the inventory or resources to complete their task. And if they don’t, they will do the logical thing and not begin.

We all know that feeling when we’ve started a project and not too long into it, we realize we can’t finish it. Embarrassment comes over us. We fear being ashamed and mocked. We realize we might have been a bit overzealous.

So, what does Jesus want us to assess? What inventory or resources does he say we need? How will we have a successful discipleship?

Maybe we need fortitude for when things get hard? What about patience for those long and tiresome days? How about wisdom and discernment for when things aren’t always so clear? And wouldn’t boldness be good for standing up to foes and enemies?

And those are all good things. And at certain times, we certainly need them and more. But that’s not what Jesus says we need most of all.

**Irony of Discipleship**

You see, there’s an irony to Jesus’ answer in verse 33. Jesus isn’t saying that we need to look within and see whether we are morally fit and strong enough to follow him. He isn’t saying only the best-of-the-best can come after me. Only those who’ve got it all together. And in fact, what we see in Jesus’ ministry is that it is often those who see themselves as the morally fit who bar themselves from Jesus. And those, like the prostitutes and tax collectors, who know their unfitness, are more ready to receive Jesus and his grace.

Jesus is saying what we need above all else is to bid farewell to all the things we typically think support our lives. And the word translated “possessions” encompasses more than just material possessions. Jesus is saying, “If you cannot let go of the belief that *you* can support and save your own life, you’ll never be able to follow me.” Ultimately, the thing that will keep you away from Jesus is the persistent and hardened belief that your life doesn’t depend on him.

Jesus knows we are inclined to root our identity and sense of self in what we own and what we control and what we’ve accomplished. And the narrow road into discipleship can only be entered by letting go of the idea that we need anything or anyone other than Jesus to give us a lasting identity and sense of self.

But we struggle with this, don’t we? And what we fear is that somehow Jesus won’t provide. We worry that maybe what Jesus gives won’t measure up to what we could gain on our own. We wonder how Jesus could demand things from us that go against how we feel, and how we believe we were created.

And so, what is Jesus’ answer to these questions and doubts and fears? What ingredient do we need for our discipleship?

**Ingredient of Discipleship**

Salt. What does Jesus mean? His point is that endurance is key. Like salt, discipleship must maintain its distinctiveness all the way to the end. And we need endurance because following Christ isn’t easy. Discipleship will test your deepest feelings. It is going to offend and unsettle what you believe about yourself. It will confront your deepest fears and disrupt your comfort. And without endurance, we fade and lose our distinctiveness.

But, where does this salt of endurance come from? From within us, or from someone else? To get at that question, remember at the beginning of our passage it says large crowds were traveling with Jesus. Where was he going? Jerusalem. And who made that decision? Jesus (Lk. 9:51). And why? “Because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem” (Lk. 13:33). You see, Jesus never turned to the crowds and said, “*If* you follow me, then I’ll go to the cross for you.” Jesus went to the cross knowing that a disciple would betray him and hand him over to death. And another disciple would deny him, and the rest would flee in his hour of need.

The reason we can be confident of enduring in our discipleship is because Jesus endured the torment and suffering and rejection on the cross to the bitter end. He’s the one who gave up more than we could ever match. What you need to grasp for your discipleship, more than thinking about what you might need to give up, is that Jesus went to the cross more willingly than we’ll do anything as we follow him. And his sacrifice on the cross was more pleasing to the Father than anything we can ever offer. What Jesus did was make us his singular commitment, so we could be committed to him. He ransomed us, so we could belong to him.

And so, what is Jesus is asking of us is whether his grace will rule in our hearts. Will his work and merit on our behalf be your most treasured possession? Will you seek to grow in his grace-purchased identity?

Remember, Jesus never bars anyone from coming to him. He’s radically available and free to you this morning. But we come to him on his terms. He knows we can’t pay or purchase his grace. He simply asks you to come with empty hands. Hands that free and hearts that are open to receive what only Jesus can give us.

Amen.

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