

## The Cost of Discipleship

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday After Pentecost - Year C - 06/30/2019

Psalm Reading: 77:1-2, 11-20

1<sup>st</sup> Reading: 2 Kings 2:1-2, 13-25, 2<sup>nd</sup>: Luke 9:51-62

You know, in the field of economics there is an axiom that whenever we receive something there is an opportunity cost. That is, you could have spent your money or your time on something else.

A corollary of this basic rule of economics is: “There is no free lunch! There is always a cost involved and the receiver of the free lunch is the one who will ultimately pay. So, whenever we acquire something or even do something, it will take up our money or our time or some other resource.

When you buy a car, the thousands you spend on it could have been used for other things, a new deck on your house, a gift for your spouse, or put in your bank account for the sake of security, or even given to help others.

But we in the church know that there is one true free gift: The Grace of God, FREE Grace from God! There are no strings attached! God loves us without reservation and has given us eternal life. And we can access it through our faith in the Triune God, Father, Son and Spirit.

I think of it as being like when I was going to college and my parents decided I needed a car. So my father gave me an old Ford Maverick. Well, he did not give it to me. To receive this gift that liberated me so I could drive to school and to my part time job selling shoes at J.C. Penney, I had to hand over a dollar. Though it is a poor comparison, you might think of the

freedom represented in the car as being like God's Grace and the dollar as the little bit of faith I had to invest to access it. The dollar was a nominal sum and all it really takes to access God's Grace is a little faith. And though I had to come up with the dollar myself, the little bit of faith we need, is given to us as well. And you know the little bit we invest is truly nothing in comparison to what we receive.

So, yes, it is true. God's Grace is a free Gift! But, in the nature of things, this free Grace from the Almighty does something to us. It plants something inside of us, love, hope, and relational unity. It is so powerful that it causes a response that must necessarily come from us.

So, we do not earn our salvation, we do not earn God's Grace, but the Grace causes us to freely give of ourselves in grateful response to that Grace inside of us. And this response becomes a calling, a call to discipleship.

We know a disciple is a person who follows and imitates a master in an effort to become like the master. We listen to what the master has to say and we do our best to follow the master's precepts. This is what we do as Christians. We follow Christ.

I think we are all aware that we will never reach the perfection that attains to Jesus. But it is our duty to attempt it. And so we intensely study the Bible. We pray. We come to church. We give of ourselves to others. But sometimes, it seems hard, because, indeed, there are hard choices to make. In fact, a glance at this week's Gospel reading presents some of the most difficult passages in the New Testament. And dredges

up some of the most obtuse questions to confront us in our faith.

In the Gospel of Luke, chapter nine, Jesus is walking on the road through Samaria toward Jerusalem when when a man says to him. *“I will follow you wherever you go.”* (NIV, Luke 9:57) Now, this is a bold statement and one we would like to be able to make for ourselves. But we hesitate because we Christians have read this story before. Jesus is on the road to Jerusalem! And we know what that means. He is ostensibly going for the Passover feast, but we know what is really going to happen when Jesus gets there. There will be arrest, official torture, and a brutal crucifixion. Christ will die for our sins.

This man says he is willing to follow Jesus *wherever* he goes. Would we go that far? Would we go to the very cross to save humanity for their sins? I don't know...

The response from Jesus makes you think twice, *“Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”* (v.58) Basically, Jesus is saying that there will be no rest. There will be no end to your efforts. If you follow Christ you will have to give up on the idea that you are at home in the world. Because the secular world is all about “me, me, me”. But a relationship with Christ means that your focus cannot be on yourself; It must be on others. This is not an easy road. Because we, indeed, cannot become comfortable on our couch as we watch television, with a glass of pop in one hand and a bowl of chips on our lap. This may be why your average church pew is not made for comfort and we do not fill the sanctuary with arm chairs. So, you see, we cannot be comfortable with the notion that we are privileged and others

are not because we are somehow better than others. We are all valued in the eyes of God.

Jesus says to another man. *“Follow me.”* (v.59) This is a wide open invitation to discipleship. Indeed, the invitation is open to all humanity. We may all pick up our coat and follow Jesus. The man seems earnest enough. But before he embarks on this journey with Jesus, he makes a request, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” Seems reasonable, doesn’t it? We feel for the man. In this church, and most others, and at the time, in ancient Judea, funerals are and were a kind of sacred duty, giving honor to those who have passed on.

The response of Jesus seems harsh, *“Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”* Let the dead bury their own dead! I must tell you I have labored over this passage for a long time to tease out its meaning. Does Jesus mean that we just leave bodies lying on the ground? I cannot believe he is speaking in a literal sense. Indeed, Jesus often speaks in parables and wraps a great deal of meaning even into brief phrases. I think that is partly what is happening here.

Also, I think we may lose something in not understanding ancient culture. In that day when someone said they were going to wait to bury their father, it did not mean that the father was dead. It could mean that the man was going to stick around until the father had passed away.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps for many years. What Jesus is talking about here is that the choice the man must make in this situation is a matter of priorities. How important is your faith? Is it the most important aspect of your

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1 <https://billygraham.org/answer/what-did-jesus-mean-when-he-said-to-let-the-dead-bury-the-dead/>

life? Indeed, it should be, but I also believe your faith may also point you back to family duties.

So what these verses are trying to tell us is that in this life we have priorities, we have interests that tug on our time and resources. These interests come from the surrounding secular culture that distracts us from our duty, and our family can sometimes be opposed to our faith. What Jesus is telling us is that the most important priority is our discipleship. We must be willing to give up all for Christ.

My question is, “Just how do we do this?” How do we become disciples? Ever since I heard God call me, I have struggled with this. How do we become the Christians that God would have us be?

In a discussion The Reverend Dr. Longfield told a group of seminarians including myself that we must learn to live into the role of being a pastor. A bunch of us were soon to be minted ministers of the Word and Sacrament. All of us were feeling perhaps a bit inadequate to the task before us. Indeed, the standards of behavior for a minister, or any Christian, as we are all ministers, are pretty high.

The way he explained it, or at least the way I understand it, is that it does not matter how we feel inside. We may be trepidatious. We may doubt ourselves, at least at first. We must act the part of the Christ-like person we are trying to become, and like a good method actor, as we act the part we become the part. Pretty soon, as we follow the rules that Christ sets down for us, as we assume the role of discipleship, it becomes habit. It begins to indwell us.

You might look at this as opening yourself to God, to the Spirit, to the concrete precepts of Christianity as defined by the Master, Christ our Lord. In the First Letter of John, the Apostle writes, “This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit.” So as we come to inhabit the role of Christian we receive an indwelling of the Spirit, an indwelling of our Triune God.

And so we find out that there is a free lunch. The giving of God’s grace, God’s love, the gift of the spirit and our indwelling Christ. And really, the way we receive it is through our faith, opening ourselves to God in a way that allows us to accept the gift. And the gift actually frees us. It frees us from the bounds of secular culture. It brings us the peace, comfort and love of God. And as it indwells us, we can assume the role we were always meant by God to take up, the role we are always growing into, “Disciples of Christ”.

Please put yourselves in a posture for prayer...

Eternal God, thank you for your ever-presence. Thank you for your boundless love. You have made us in your image and sent Christ to be the perfect example to us of that image. Help us to develop the skill to imitate that image, so that we may all, one day, dwell together in the harmony of your kingdom.

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