

A Disciple's Heart

13th Sunday after Pentecost

September 3 and 4, 2022

First in a Series of Four Sermons: "A Heart from God/A Heart for Others"

Luke 14:25-35

For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, "This man began to build and was not able to finish. Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?"

Dear Friends in Christ,

Did you ever really want to do something, but you really really really didn't want to put in the hard work necessary to do it?

In last Sunday's children's sermon, I suggested that I really wanted to qualify for the Boston Marathon, and that I really really want not just to qualify for that prestigious race - it is my strong desire to win that race for the 70 and under crowd. However, and perhaps you guessed it -I really really really really have no desire to put in the effort to accomplish any of that. Or to say it another way, I really don't have the *heart* of a serious runner.

In fact, that children's sermon spoke in hypothetical language. In other words, I just made it up to illustrate last Sunday's message, which focused on striving and struggling and putting in the effort to run the race that has been marked out for us.

This morning, I offer a true story that happened 15 years ago or so. (Story of buying Debi a keyboard for her 60th birthday party / Me deciding that I really wanted to learn how to play the piano / Debi agreeing to teach me/ The first lesson turned out be the the one and only lesson / She showed me where Middle C was, I practiced a bit, tried to memorize the keys / After about a half hour, I asked if we could use magic marker to mark the keys, so I wouldn't have to memorize / Debi wondering out loud if I was serious about learning how to play piano. I thought about it for a minute or so, and my piano career came to a screeching halt.

Although I really wanted to become an awesome and accomplished pianist, I really really really did not have the desire to put in the effort required to get from Point A

to Point B. Or to day it another way, I really didn't have the *heart* of a serious pianist.

For over 30 years now, the Mission Statement of Faith Lutheran has been "A Heart from God / A Heart for Others." That Mission Statement forms the basis for our September sermon series. Next week, we will explore "A Shepherd's Heart." The week after that - "A Steward's Heart." Two weeks from now - "A Rich Man's Heart."

Today, our theme is "A Disciple's Heart." We begin by noting that it is possible to follow Christ superficially. George Barna research suggests that about half of what he defines as evangelical Christians read their Bible one or less times each week.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was Lutheran Pastor famous for resisting Germany's Nazi Party and losing his life doing so. In his book, "The Cost of Discipleship," we find him describing what he calls "cheap grace" as the *preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession...grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ living and incarnate.*"

Harsh words, to be sure, Words that accuse and accuse and are the opposite of the warm fuzzy preaching society prefers today. Words we would explore today, as we find Jesus addressing a few men who really wanted to be His disciples. Three warnings Jesus would give us today about following Him closely.

First, it will include making the hard choices. Secondly, carrying our assigned crosses. And third, renouncing our possessions.

To have a disciple's heart is to be Making the hard choices

First, we note the hard choice our Father in heaven made when He sent His only begotten and beloved Son into a sinful world to drink in full the cup of His divine wrath. We note the hard choices Jesus made, one right after another. The hard choice to give up the riches of heaven for the poverty of Bethlehem, the obscurity of Nazareth, and the agony of Calvary. The hard choices in the wilderness when tempted by Satan to take the easy way out, to compromise the truth, and to abort the journey leading to the cross. The hard choices Jesus made in the Garden of Gethsemane not to call a legion of angels in His defense. While being beaten bloody, the choice to endure without complaint. While getting nailed to the cross, the choice to pray for His Father to forgive them. While gasping for His final

breath the choice to make sure His mom would be taken care of, the choice to promise paradise to a repentant thief, the choice to fulfill all prophecy in obedience to his Father.

What does it mean, dear friends, for us to have a heart from God and at the same time a heart for others? First it means hearing the Word of God, and secondly, it means keeping it. First it means being still and knowing that God is Who He says He is, and secondly, spending our lives testifying to His omnipotence, His omniscience, and His omnipresence. First it means rejoicing that God made every hard choice imaginable with our salvation in mind, and secondly, seeing the people in our lives as redeemed and precious and forgiven souls.

What does it mean to have the heart of a disciple? It means first of all sitting down and calculating the cost, or as we Lutherans like to call it - Confirmation Class. On the one hand, salvation is free and received by faith alone in Jesus Christ, but on the other hand, saving faith never comes alone. It always comes with good works that have been assigned before we were ever born.

Or to use the language of today's text, faith that is alive and well will face hard choices, not just once in awhile, but regularly. In today's Old Testament lesson, Moses preaches, **"I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. That you and your offspring may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him..."**

The kingdom of God is like a wife who forgives her husband in response to God forgiving her, even though He is neither apologizing nor changing His ways.

It's like a couple who is kind and patient and loving towards their adult children, even though they often disappoint and regularly disrespect them.

It's like grandparents who keep on loving and being generous with their grandchildren, even though the thank yous are few and far between.

Carrying our assigned crosses

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.

I could preach for a long time on this verse, but I choose not to. To put it simply, if you have to choose between family and God, choose God. If push comes to shove, and if family is actually pulling you away from the love of Jesus Christ, do what you need to do to be seeking first the kingdom of God. If following Jesus Christ means denying certain pleasures and good times with family and friends, go ahead and deny yourself, consider your cross to be assigned, pick it up, and carry it.

Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.

The cross a disciple is to carry isn't just the difficulties of life, like illness, an accident, turmoil at work, or frustration with loved ones. These may simply result from living in a sin corrupted world. Crosses are difficulties or suffering that result from a faithful attachment to Jesus and from faithfully representing Him in proclaiming the Gospel.

To have the heart of a disciple is to give Jesus top priority in life. It isn't just to be a curious onlooker, but one fully committed to learning from his master. Not to just be along for the ride, but one who catches his master's spirit and to become like his teacher as much as possible.

A man named Salman Barbari was born in Iran to a strict Muslim family from Afghanistan. But in 2018 he was baptized into the Name of the Triune God and became a Christian at Trinity Lutheran Church in Berlin, Germany. By doing so, he created serious potential consequences for his future and safety. Under Islamic law, Barbari could be sent to jail in Iran for converting to Christianity. In Afghanistan, he could be put to death. For Mr. Barbari, following Jesus had put enmity between his Muslim family and himself. To love Jesus with all of His heart meant breaking the heart of his own family.

The Good News, of course, is that a broken heart, God will never despise. Jesus isn't telling us to go looking for crosses to carry, but when they come our way, go ahead and pick them up and carry them.

One preacher said it this way, "Being a Christian is not a halfway kind of thing. Either you are or you are not. And if you are, then be prepared to make some sacrifices... There can be no half-hearted effort or middle ground when it comes to discipleship. This shouldn't come as a surprise if you think about it. Great things are seldom achieved without sacrifice.

The kingdom of God is like a congregation of believers who feel guilty and uncomfortable whenever the preacher talks about picking up their crosses and carrying them. Again and again, they think to themselves how far they have fallen short of God's glory and how undeserving they are of His grace. And in that very moment, they look to the cross where they see exactly how deep was the Father's love for them. They look to the cross, where Jesus loved His disciples to the end and with all of His heart and all of His soul.

The kingdom of God is like a man who tries hard, but fails in so many ways, day after day. Each night he prays for God to bless whatever he may have done well and forgive all that he has done wrong. He lays his head down in peace, resting in the forgiveness of His sins. In the morning, He used to jump out of bed, but these days, he sort of rolls out, He makes the sign of the cross. He rejoices that he is a child of God, and He sets out to live one more day in a way that will honor His Savior.

Renouncing our possessions

So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

We know what it meant for Jesus to renounce all that He had and do the will of His Father. It meant that He had nowhere to lay His head at night, it meant that He never owned a house, never had a 401k plan, never paid property taxes, never collected a Social Security check, never had a closet full of clothes, never saved up for a rainy day. He simply listened to the voice of His Father, He did the will of His Father, He carried out the mission His Father sent Him to do, even though it cost Him everything. He trusted that even if there was death by crucifixion, there would be a glorious resurrection. That all's well that ends well.

We know what it meant for the early disciples to renounce all they had. It meant living their fishing boats, their carpenter's workshops, and their tax collector table. It meant leaving family and friends and caring more about the salvation of the world than the security of providing for themselves. It meant trusting that God would provide for their needs, without exception. For many of them it meant persecution, ridicule, and even martyrdom in cruel fashion.

The final question of the day - what does it mean for us in this place in this day and age to renounce our possessions and to follow Jesus.

- Story told by Juan Carlos Ortiz of a pearl of great price. A man sees this pearl, wants this pearl, and really wants to buy it. The cost is everything he has, including \$10,000 in the bank, \$100 in cash, his home, his camper, his two cars, his wife, his 3 kids.
- The man wonders where he is supposed to live. The answer, “I will allow you to use all these things for the time being. But don’t forget they’re all mine, just as you are. And whenever I need any of them, you must give them up, because I am now the owner.”

The kingdom of God is like a congregation of believers full of folks whose hearts are being changed in this very hour. By the power of the Holy Spirit, they find themselves to be more and more in love with Jesus Christ. They have their bad days, their good days, and their really good days.

- On their bad days, their hearts are distracted, they sort of wonder aimlessly through their days, they imagine that they can have their cake and eat it too. They follow Jesus at a distance, they are easily discouraged, and their good intentions go awry.
- On their good days, they go to their Savior with a broken heart. They cry out for His forgiveness, and they throw themselves on His mercy.
- On their really good days, they go looking for hurting hearts that need to be listened to, they make hard choices that are pleasing to God, they carry their assigned crosses with quiet hearts, more and more they hate what God hates, and they love what He loves. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.