

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

“The Cost and Reward of Discipleship”

Our Redeemer Dallas 2020

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

Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men. And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed Him (Luke 5:10-11).

Is that true? “Everything”? Are we sure Luke isn’t being a little dramatic, here? Comedian Jim Gaffigan has a pretty funny bit where he talks about the disciples, who, as he says,

are used as examples of people who gave up everything to follow Jesus. They gave up everything. But, you know, they were fishermen. It’s not like they were investment bankers. Jesus went up to them and said, “Hey, you know you’re sitting here in the blistering heat trying to catch fish in the dead sea.” “Yeah, it [stinks].” “You want to follow Me? I’m God. By the way, I can turn water into wine.” “Alright, I’ll go with you.” “One condition: You have to give up everything, and I mean everything.” “So, I leave the pole here?”¹

It’s funny, but is that really all we’re talking about? Is that the true cost of discipleship? A crummy job in the middle of backwater, first century Palestine? Or is it something more? What *did* the disciples agree to that day when they left everything and followed Jesus?

Certainly,

They didn’t do it on a whim.

We’re told that Jesus spent some time teaching from the boat he borrowed from Simon Peter, who surely heard every word. He and the others, including brothers James and John, witnessed the miraculous catch of fish, to which Peter responded by confessing his sin to Jesus, even calling Him “Lord.” And then the Absolution: “Do not be afraid,” followed immediately by a commission, an invitation to participate in the mission of God: “from now on you will be catching men.”

We know that no one can come to Jesus unless the Father draws Him (John 6:44). We confess with Luther, “I believe that I cannot believe,” that is, not by our own

¹ “King Baby” (2011).

reason or strength. We are “too far down the hill” for that -- *all* the way down the hill, if Romans 3 is to be believed (verses 10-18). We are dead men walking, and nothing short of a resurrection, a spiritual resuscitation, can bring us back to life. So it is with us, and so it was with Peter, James, and John. There’s no *way* they would have followed Jesus, *except* for the Word, the Law and the Gospel, which *enlivened* them to fear, love, and trust in Him.

So, they left everything and followed Him.

But at what cost?

Fishing was actually a pretty decent profession in the ancient world. People gotta eat. I don’t know whether they were allowed to take their poles with them or not, but it’s not like they didn’t leave *anything*. They left their boats, James and John left their father, and *all* of them left their former life behind. It was no more. For that is the cost of discipleship. You don’t just give up something, or several things; you give up *everything*. You deny *yourself* and follow Jesus, wherever He leads.

Now, granted, that doesn’t sound like much fun. No one *wants* to be denied, much less be the one to deny *yourself*. In many ways, that’s the *opposite* of how we operate! We live to *approve* ourselves, to make allowances for what we think or feel is right. But because we’re fallen human creatures, what we *think* or *feel* is right isn’t always. The Law that is written on our hearts has been so dulled by sin that we don’t always read it correctly. We forget the will of God or confuse it with the popular will of the culture. You simply can’t trust yourself. The Old Adam is still alive and well in you, seeking, along with the devil and the world, to deceive or mislead you into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. The *last* thing they want you to do is to deny yourself. “Deny *God*,” they say. “Deny His *Word*. No one believes that anymore. Get with the times! Get on the right side of history! You be you, and don’t worry about what some old book has to say.” It’s a voice that persists in coming in loud and clear.

And that’s why we need the word of Jesus. Jesus sets our priorities straight. He directs us *back* to the will of God, which is holy and righteous and good. He says, “Follow Me. Become My student. Learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:29). There is *no* rest to be had out in the world, only *unrest*, anxiety, strife. But with Jesus, there is forgiveness. There is peace, the kind which the world cannot give, no matter how much you embrace it. And so, Jesus says, “Follow Me. It is the only way.”

For the disciples, this meant leaving not only their jobs and their families, it eventually meant losing their *lives* for Jesus’s sake. When Jesus later asks Peter who

people say that He is, and Peter answers, “You are the Christ,” Jesus praises his answer, giving glory to the Father for revealing this to him. But then, for the first time, Jesus tells him and the other disciples *where* He is leading them: to Jerusalem, where He will suffer many things and be killed. And Peter *rebukes* Him, saying, “No way. That’s not what I signed up for!” And Jesus says, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” Man would *save* his life, at all cost; but the cost of discipleship is precisely the willingness to *lose* one’s life for the Gospel (see Matthew 16:21-25).

And sure enough, with the exception of Judas, each and every one of those men died for their faith in Christ. Emboldened by His resurrection from the dead, they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for His Name.

And knowing that, the question we must ask *ourselves* is

Is it worth it?

Is it *worth* it to suffer dishonor for the sake of following Jesus? For loving what He loves and hating what He hates, even if the *whole world* stands against you?

We ask this of our catechumens each year, and I always wonder if they really understand the answer we tell them to give. We say, “Do you intend to live according to the Word of God, and in faith, word, and deed to remain true to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, even to death? Do you intend to continue steadfast in the confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?” And they, dutifully reading the script, respond, “I do, by the grace of God.” That’s quite a promise. And we’ve all made it. We have all publicly confessed that we would rather *die* than deny Christ or any part of His teaching, including the parts we don’t like. That we would rather *suffer all* than submit again to the yoke of slavery to sin, following Jesus all the way to the cross, if necessary. Is it worth it? We don’t like pain very much. We don’t even like to suffer *emotionally*. We prefer comfort, acceptance. We want to be liked, praised and adored.

But that’s not the life of a Christian. Following Jesus means swimming *upstream*, not *with* the current. It means *rejection*, not recognition. For, as Jesus says, “‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:18). Christ has chosen you *out* of the world. That means you no longer fit in with it. You are but a stranger here, an outcast. And the world will never let you forget it, not if you stay true to God’s Word. They will, as Jesus said to His first disciples, “deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake...But the one who endures to the end will be saved” (Matthew 24:9, 13).

And that's how we know it's worth it. "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Romans 8:18). The sufferings of this life *pale* in comparison to the joys of heaven that await us in Christ. The Word says "now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully" (1 Corinthians 13:12). We don't even *know* how good it's going to be -- at *least* as good as it was in the beginning, if not better. We may cry here, but in heaven there are no tears. We may suffer rejection here, but in heaven our Savior waits to embrace us with loving arms. We die here, but an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear His voice and come out. And then the *real* journey begins.

"They left everything and followed him."

May we be so bold.

I'm not saying it'll be easy -- anything but. In fact, with man it is *impossible*. But that's why, when we make that promise, we say, "I do, *by the grace of God*." Because it is by *grace* we have been saved (Ephesian 2:8). It is by the wholly underserved kindness of God that He has called us to faith by the Gospel, that He gathers us here, together, in this place, that He sanctifies us, makes us holy, and *keeps* us in the true faith. You think the first disciples could have done that on their own? Suffered what they did, making the good confession in the face of certain death, *without* the help of God? Neither can you. You are sinful men and women. We *all* are. Our Lord should take one look at us and depart from us.

But instead, He says, "Do not be afraid, your sins are forgiven; from now on, you will be catching men." You are invited to participate in the mission of God, making disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19). You are called to make the good confession in the presence of your children, your family, your friends. They may hate you for it, but if so, then "Blessed are you...for your reward is great in heaven" (Matthew 5:12).

Is that being a little dramatic? Not at all. The cost of discipleship is great, but so is the reward. It is *worth* it. For there is only one God, one Lord, who has redeemed you, who loves you, and who calls you by name.

In + Jesus' name. Amen. The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo gloria