

***What Would You Give?***  
**Pastor Judy Bangsund**  
**September 4, 2016**

**Deuteronomy 30:15-20**  
**Philemon, vs 1-21**  
**Luke 14:25-33**

Dear Friends, I greet you in Jesus' name.

I don't know about you, but this morning's Gospel lesson made me squirm a bit. Jesus' words seem a bit harsh, don't they? I mean, hate your family? Your very life? Give up *everything* in order to follow him? Like what: school, your job? Isn't that just a tad extreme?

It not only sounds harsh, it seems to fly in the face of grace. Didn't Jesus die for my sins? Aren't the gifts of forgiveness and eternal life free? So, how does discipleship square with the teaching of grace?

It doesn't sound right. It doesn't even sound do-able. So we need to sort this out. Because in this congregation we talk a lot about discipleship. Discipleship is one of our core teachings. We have recently adopted the vision of *Know, Grow and Go. Know the Father, Grow as Jesus' disciples, Go with the Spirit.* We've put discipleship right at the center of all we do, following Jesus' Great Commission to "go and make disciples." And rightly so. We need to figure this out.

If you, as a good Christian (and a good Lutheran), keep coming back to grace, you do well. Salvation *is* the free gift of God in Christ. The problem is, we have a hard time believing it. In our no-free-lunch world, something so completely free goes against the grain. A seminary professor once tried to hammer this radical idea into the minds of his students. They were willing to accept it at first glance, but gradually it began to dawn on them that he really meant what he said. Salvation is *absolutely* free. Totally. Completely. There is nothing you can do to add to it. So they began to push back, because (like most people) they were pretty convinced that you had to do *something* to be made right with God. You know, something along the lines of, "I do my best and God does the rest." But the professor insisted on the seemingly impossible claim that the good news of salvation depends on Christ *alone*. Argument after argument to the contrary was batted down. Finally, the war of words began to subside. The room grew quiet; and then the professor looked out at the class and said, "Yes, salvation is free, and you are made free in Christ. Now . . . what are you going to do with that freedom?"

And *that* my friends, is where discipleship begins. Discipleship is the life you lead, once having been made right with God by his grace alone. I want you to hear this, because it will hit you whichever side of the fence you are on. Perhaps you, today, are burdened down by trying and doing and trying again and doing more – and you are still not good enough. Perhaps you feel the impossibility of reaching the bar that God sets to be made right with him. If you are that person, then this message is for you. God makes you right; he makes you blameless; he declares you "not guilty!" because of Jesus. Friend, the good news is that today you can lay your burden down.

But perhaps you sit on the other side of the fence. Perhaps you have heard his word of grace and said, "All right! If I am saved totally by his grace, then it doesn't matter what I do. I can do

whatever I want, because in the end, God will forgive me.” As Voltaire once cynically remarked, “Of course God forgives. That’s his job.” But that mocking assessment is as old as Paul who wrote to the Romans saying, “We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?” Bonhoeffer called it cheap grace: forgiveness without repentance; Communion without confession; grace without the cross. Luther said, “A religion that gives nothing, costs nothing, and suffers nothing, is worth nothing.” Think of it: if you have been rescued from certain death, perhaps from drowning at sea or from a house on fire, do you just walk away saying, “Whew! That was close!” and continue on as if it had never happened? No; you would bend over backwards to find a way to thank your rescuer – especially if your life had been saved at some risk to his own – or even more to the point, if he had lost his life in saving yours. How do you pay a debt like that? My friends, salvation is free, but it doesn't come cheap. Grace cost Jesus his life. “You are not your own,” says the Apostle Peter. “You were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.” So if you, today, are handling the costly gift of grace as if it were a cheap trinket, then you need to take a second look. And that, in itself, is grace. It’s a second chance. And it’s a whole new ball game.

Jesus modeled costly grace. He was an amazing person. When he walked this earth, he drew people to him like a magnet. They came by droves, either because they felt threatened by his message or because they wanted what he had. Jesus exuded love, compassion, confidence and purpose. He was clearly close to God, whom he called, “Father.” At the same time, his values differed widely from theirs. He didn’t care about wealth or position or prestige. He preached God’s Kingdom of love and justice and mercy – and he not only preached it; he lived it. Jesus offered a glimpse of a life far different and much better, a life worth living. And that made him either very threatening – or very, very attractive. And he awakened in them longings for a different kind of world, the world he lived out and called God’s Kingdom.

Discipleship is that life. It is a life lived in gratitude for what God has freely given in Christ. You have been freed from the slavery of sin and death – all by grace. *Now: what are you going to do with that freedom?* A slave who has just been handed his freedom papers has a second chance. A convict who has been pardoned, has been offered a new start. You are that slave. You are that convict. Jesus shows you what that new life looks like. A new set of values. A life such that you begin to think: I've been missing out; I've been wasting my life on things that make no difference; *I want what Jesus wants.* What would you give for that kind of life?

The story is told of a businessman who was at a convention with some of his colleagues. The meetings ran late and they were afraid they would miss their flight. So as soon as the meeting ended they jumped up and raced to the airport. In his hurry the businessman knocked over an apple stand. But he was zoned in on making his flight and so kept on going. Once safely at the gate, he had a moment to think about it and his conscience nudged him. So he told his buddies to explain to his wife that he’d had to take a later flight and turned around to go back to the apple stand. And he was glad he did. Because it turned out that the seller was a young girl, maybe 16 years old and she was blind. When he arrived she was still groping around for her apples, tears running down her face, as the crowd surged on by. He stopped to help her, retrieving apples and rearranging them in her stall. As he did so, he found some of the apples had become bruised. These he set aside. Then, when it was all put back to order, he took out his wallet and gave her

\$40, telling her it was to replace the spoiled apples. Then he said, "I'm sorry I ruined your day. I hope you are going to be ok." As he walked away, he heard the voice of the bewildered, blind girl behind him. "Mister? Mister? Are you... Jesus?" As he walked towards the airport he pondered those words. "Are you Jesus?" Isn't this the kind of behavior Jesus expects of his followers? And isn't this our goal: to be just like him?

You know, I bet that experience – missing his flight to help a blind girl find her apples – I bet that was the highlight of his week. Nothing else he did that week could compare. Discipleship can be costly – of your time, convenience, money – but it's what makes life worth living. High point of your day. It's what you will remember on your deathbed. Being mistaken for Jesus? Pretty cool.

What would it take to get you from where you are in your life now, to a life of following Jesus? Because when you taste that freedom; when you glimpse God's new world of love and justice and mercy – you begin to realize that *this is it* -- and it's the only life you want to live. I know that many of you here have experienced that new life, a life on mission for Christ, a life of service to others. Yes, you are still working or going to school or raising families. Yes, you still function in this world and its demands for food, shelter and clothing. But what drives you is the desire to follow Jesus. Right? To live like he did. And you have found that such a life is enormously satisfying. There is nothing like it – and why? Because this is what you were born for. God created you that way. It's God's new creation in Christ – to be fulfilled at the end of time – but already at work in you in this life.

This is why you need to be in church every week – to hear this. To hear God's word and be reminded, again and again, of what he has done for you. The kind of life he wants for you. This is why you need to be in Grow Groups – to establish a closely-knit community that intentionally supports discipleship. Because it's not easy. My friends, there is nothing more important than your walk with Christ, and your work for his Kingdom.

If you have *not* yet experienced that life, then consider: what would it take? Like Jesus said: building a tower or launching an army – sit down and figure it out. What would you be willing to sacrifice? What can you set aside in order to live that life? Make a list. Then start a new list: what would you NOT give up? I mean: wouldn't you give everything you've got, for a second chance at life? For a new life in Christ?

Jesus tells us today that this new life is so worthwhile, it makes everything else pale by comparison. It is so valuable, even family takes second place. This is the pearl of great price. This is that treasure in the field – so valuable that you would sell all you have to get it. The Apostle Paul put it another way in his letter to the Philippians. He said that everything else in his life, all his achievements, all his education and status was like junk, trash, in comparison with the surpassing worth of knowing Christ. Everything he had formerly counted as profit, he now counted as loss in comparison. Are we supposed to hate our family? In light of what Jesus says elsewhere, it's clear that he's overstating to make a point. To be his follower, Jesus *must* be number one in your life. Do you literally need to give up working and going to school? No.

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Again, the key here is priority. It's what you value most. It's the importance you place on the life that Jesus, having freed you, now offers. It's not an easy life but it is a good, full and rich life. And since you have been freed from the prison of sin and death – it's the only life that makes sense. It's the only life that will give you fulfillment and peace. What wouldn't you give? One preacher put it like this: the cost of discipleship is high. But the cost of non-discipleship is higher.

A Christian woman once asked her pastor this question: “Will you please tell me in a word, what your idea of discipleship is?” Holding out a blank sheet of paper the pastor replied, “It is to sign your name at the bottom of this blank sheet, and to let God fill it in as He will.”

And remember those bruised apples? Those apples are like you and me, spoiled by sin. What Jesus did on the cross – at no cost to you – but at great cost to himself – was to make you perfect and whole again. Now – what would you give, to live the new life he offers?