

## Sermon Labor Day 2022 You can't serve two masters.

There is one thing we need to clarify when we hear Jesus' words in today's gospel story. 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*" he doesn't mean you are to hate your family. Like some sort of petulant teenager saying I hate you I hate you! Actually, the Greek word in translation would be more accurately 'to love less'. The point is He is using this shock tactic to grab their attention.

Just before this passage in Luke's story, remember Jesus has been at a fancy dinner at the house of a big shot Pharisee, where he offended the guests who were full of themselves, and their status in the community. He told them, next time you throw a banquet they should "invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind." You can imagine just how popular a dinner guest Jesus must have been when he was at His most provocative.

And in today's reading He is back on the road to Jerusalem accompanied by a "great crowd," and he is in the same mood. People are gathered around him because they have been woken by his challenging words to the possibility that life could be better and fairer.

On the way to Jerusalem Jesus is seeking out followers who are serious about becoming devoted to new life in the world as God intends it. And to get there he is challenging people who might have so far only followed him because he is exciting and charismatic and a miracle worker. He wants them to know that the world needs to turn and that will entail a turning in their own lives. *He wants us to know that too.* And doesn't the world need to turn now just as needfully? God's kingdom can't flourish with things as they are, then as now. He wants to know who is really committed and prepared to dwell in that kingdom, in how they live their lives.

So this shock tactic saying hate your family is not about renouncing family and possessions, and more about asking us to confront how attached we are to the

comfortable life, and how far we are willing and able to change emphasis, priorities and direction, and to open our hearts and minds to what God wants to involve us in.

Later in this gospel Jesus says you can't serve two masters; if you try to you will not manage it, because you will love one of them less than the other, and one of them more than the other (Luke 16.13)

Today's gospel challenge has Jesus asking *us* "If any want to be my disciples, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9.23).

The message in today's Gospel reminds us that actually we already submitted to this call through our Baptismal promises. So - what does that commit us to?

Sometimes I wonder how seriously we expect to be taken by today's secular world that is superficial in values, but troubled in spirit. My wondering deepens when I find myself looking at things for sale in cathedral shops and Christian bookstores. I used to ponder this when I was at Grace Cathedral SF sifting through the catalogues full of things companies wanted us to stock in the cathedral shop, Alongside bibles, prayer books and olive wood crosses there is a staggering mass of merchandise on offer, with little messages and biblical quotations printed on them. There are things to wear, things to adorn your home, hang in your car, your office, over your bed, over someone else's bed; things to ward off bad things happening. Things in child and baby form or size, things for you if you are a boy or if you are a girl. And they often come in different languages and colors too. Scented candles and Cds feature heavily in these places. There is usually the inspiration section with quotes from people like Martin L King and Gandhi, Chinese proverbs and lots of stuff about smiles and angels. One of my favorites is a crystal bracelet which comes in a box with a prayer saying the Trinity means "wisdom, peace and purity". Really? Does it? And all these years I thought Trinity meant Father son and Holy Spirit, one God. And I'm sure you did too.

How, I wonder, does this stuff nurture anyone's faith and spirituality.

In stark contrast to these fripperies, our Christian sensibilities are awakened more realistically this week particularly when we see the harrowing images of some of the 3 million people whose entire lives and livelihoods have been washed away in Pakistan, and the 1200 so far who have drowned, and people fleeing the horrors of war and persecution- all of such horrors, which jolt us every day. From the relative comfort of our homes we watch these poor souls, trekking in abject misery, salvaging only what they can sometimes only the clothes they stand up in.

Everyone needs clothing, shelter, the household items that sustain life, make hospitality possible, things that enable us to have dignity and well-being. The question we might ask is what is enough? If we have enough how do we respond to those who are nowhere near having enough? We might be involved in local outreach initiatives of various kinds like here at St John's, and giving financial aid, and this kind of giving is of course the essential and immediate response to the gospel call. But what else lies beyond that for the Christian soul to embrace? What is in the very core of our lives that defines our faithfulness? The answer is that it is the cross. The cross that is both terrible and glorious.

The cross commits us to identify with those who are in every way dispossessed, and to do so for their salvation, and for ours.

And we demonstrate this by how we use and how we allocate resources, how we welcome others, how we behave in and use God's world, its energy, wealth and natural resources. These are our outward expressions of conscience and prayer that begin to illustrate the power of the cross in our lives. They are our commitment to placing our actions in God's hands as individuals and as citizens.

Which leads to the last bidding of Jesus in today's gospel "None of you can be my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions" (Luke14.33).

When Jesus grabbed the crowd's attention with his challenging words he was testing out who was really going to follow his teaching, and who was going to pay lip service, stand on the side lines but not put themselves out. He was shaking the wheat from the chaff. How much might that resonate today? Those who come along but stand on the sidelines find Jesus Christ interesting and his two thousand year-old Church has lots of interesting history, practices and doctrines, but they do not compromise or modify their lives or put themselves out to engage with and live out the gospel.

One Sunday a man comes to the church service and afterwards introducing himself to the minister he says *I am looking around for a church to belong to - and this might be the one. But I need to tell you I am so busy in my work and life that I am not going to be able to sign up for any of your committees or groups, but you'll see me at services on Sundays* The minister replied I'm not sure this is the church for you. I think there's one that will suit your better. Go out the door, turn right, then down the hill half a mile and you'll see it on the next corner. The man went as the priest said and arrived at a church all boarded up and derelict.

Jesus wants us to see that the *cost* of discipleship is understanding that there is a higher calling on our lives. The disciple does not tell God, I'm only available these two hours on Sunday. The disciple lets the Lord know, "Here I am God, ready to be used by you." It's a balance we need to strike between need and indulgence. Bibles and simple olive wood crosses, or cute pseudo spiritual fripperies.

The trivial merchandise promoted for selling in church detracts from and even damages our sense of the serious demands of the gospel upon us. The cross requires us to limit our demands for ourselves so that others can also have enough.

We need to offer ourselves our souls our bodies and our generosity if we are to be taken seriously, when we speak about having God in our lives. And that is what is required of us as followers of Jesus Christ.

Labor Day is an important day for us to be reminded about work. About what work

means to us and what it should mean in our relationship with Christ . So what does taking up your cross truly mean? Does it mean a major spiritual travail involving suffering or sacrifice? Or does it mean doing what we do gving our all because of our commitment to Jesus Christ? Following Jesus may well have a cost – are we up to it? What helps us to decide if we are up to it is knowing that He loved us with his all, and died for love of us. And he asks are we willing us to give our all as His disciples.

The words of Isaiah proclaim it beautifully “I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, here *am* I, send me.”                    AMEN