

## Sermon for Sept. 8, 2019 – “Give It Up”

23<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in OT, Year C – Texts: Luke 14:25-33

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I think I know what a lot of you are thinking right now and it's something like “Who in their right mind, “on Grandparents Day uses a scripture reading where Jesus says, “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother (and presumably grandfather and grandmother) cannot be my disciple?”” For the record it's actually the lectionary reading for today and I'm fairly sure that Jesus said these challenging words to be sure to make a serious point about discipleship and about our priorities. So, with that in mind, I will say that the text got me to thinking about my parents and my grandparents and what they taught me about discipleship. I remember the house where I grew up and I remember with particular vividness the living room. My mother made sure that our living-room was always in perfect, pristine condition. Everything looked new and unused largely because anytime anything began to show any signs of wear mom went out and bought something new to replace it. Whenever we were in the living room, which was rare, we had to be exceptionally careful not disrupt anything. No throw pillows could be moved, no dirt could be tracked, no signs of anyone actually having been there were allowed. Even as kid I didn't understand what the fuss was about. I mean, why was it called a living room if there was no living allowed in it? Now, as an adult I understand only a slight bit more the desire to keep one's possessions in good condition. And I also understand that nice things and dogs don't really mix unless you don't mind dog hair everywhere. Yet, Jesus's conditions on discipleship today certainly poke at our materialism. We like our stuff and Jesus knows it. Jesus continues the usual theme of pointing our faults with His words on discipleship and possessions.

Today's Gospel lesson has an unusual setting. Normally we pick up with Jesus in the gospels after He's traveled to a new place. But today, Jesus is still on the road. He's somewhere between destinations with a crowd of people following Him. You can almost picture it, Jesus and the disciples on to their next village or town to preach in with a large crowd following a short distance behind. From Jesus's words to the crowds we can guess that they were complaining. Kind of like the Israelites following Moses through the desert, the crowd is complaining about the journey. “Where are we going?” “When we will get there?” “What can we expect?” “What will we get out of it?” It sounds like the crowds are beginning to wonder whether following Jesus was a good idea. They're looking for some way out of the deal. They want the benefits of being followers but so far all they've found is a walk through the desert. And so, after hearing enough complaining – Jesus stops. He turns and lays into the whiny followers behind Him, “Look, I didn't say this would be easy. In fact, I told you that you'd have to give up everything. your homes, your families, your jobs, everything about your lives. If you're going to follow me that means carrying a cross. My cross. You say you want to know what the plan is?!?! Yet, how many contractors sit down and plan an entire project before beginning one phase? None. You say you want assurances that we're going somewhere worth going to? Yet, how many generals sit down with an enemy just across the battlefield and say, “Well, looks like we won't win. Let's send out the white flag.”? None. If you want to be My followers, you're going to have to give up your need for certainty, your need for assurance, all the things tying you to your life before now.” Jesus lays it out plainly for the crowds. They **cannot** hold on to their former lives and follow Jesus.

Jesus knows that no builder can plan a whole project before it's started. If you think I'm wrong think of all those contractors on HGTV who say things like, "Well, you don't know how much the renovations will cost before you open up the walls." And yet the walls come down in search of show home living rooms, master chef kitchens, and dream master bedrooms. Jesus is calling out those who're grasping for the next new and shiny thing.

Think of all the wars being fought around the world for the sake of money and/or power. For the soldiers and civilians with little to no stake in the outcome dying at the hands of warlords and rulers who are trying to get or hold on to power. Jesus is calling out those who're holding onto things with all their might, and at any cost, power and control.

And now think of the church and how we're like those crowds. How we're looking for the things, possessions, that we can hold onto as well. Things like eternal life without actually feeling the need to change anything about ourselves. Things like membership without having to actually do anything. All of the rights but none of the responsibilities. But here's the thing about possessions, about the stuff we hold on to. The more we try to hold on the more the stuff holds on to us. The more people want the next new and shiny thing the more they become slaves to keeping up with the Jones', to standing in line for that new iPhone, getting that new car or having that kitchen renovated again. The more people try to hold on to power, to be in control and call the shots, the more they must descend into darkness in order to keep power. And here in the church the more we see membership and faith, even God, as something we have, something that we can own, that we can hold on to, the more it demands, the more weeks we have to keep making appearances, to be in good standing, the more time we have to devote to keeping everything going, all the traditions, duties and tasks, the more money we have to shovel into a hole that never seems to fill up. When membership and faith and God become possessions, they soon begin to own us trapping us in a never-ending cycle of keep it all afloat. Jesus says, if you want to be a disciple you need to give up your possessions, your pretensions and your preconceived notions. You need to give up all the things you're holding on to because they will ultimately hold on to you and drag you under. Jesus says, the thing you need to hold on to is the cross. **THE. CROSS.** Not your own cross in the sense of it being one that you've made for yourself but **His** cross in the sense of being one that has been made expressly for you. And again, here's the thing about the cross. We know that story. We know that Jesus carried the cross through the streets of Jerusalem. We know that He hauled it up to Calvary on Good Friday. But we also know that He stopped carrying the cross because once He was atop the hill, the "Place of the Skull", the cross carried Him. The cross held on to Him. Nailed to it, the cross trapped Jesus just like all the things that we hold on to eventually do to us. That is until Easter morning when all of sudden the cross that held Jesus on Good Friday became the cross that holds all of us.

Jesus calls the crowds and us to carry the cross because Jesus knows that we can't carry it. Why? Because the cross when you get right down to it actually carries us. In world full of possessions that will hold on to us, possess us and drag us down, all the power, control, membership, status, new kitchens, pristine living rooms, all the things. In our world full of all that the cross is the only thing that lifts us up. The cross is **THE** place where the human need to hold on is met by God's need to give up. To give up wrath for love. To give up judgment for mercy. To give up sin for grace. To give up death for life. Jesus calls the crowds and us to give up our possessions, though not necessarily literally. Jesus isn't telling us that we need to empty our bank accounts, liquidate all our IRA's and 401K's and give away all our stuff. No, what we're being asked to do is to recognize that the things to which we hold on, keep us from seeing just what or just who is truly carrying us.

Our world may never give up the quest for what's new and shiny. Our rulers may always be willing to sacrifice people for power. Yet – and here, brothers and sisters, in the thing - God just may be calling the church to give up holding onto membership as something we own, that owes us something and that carries no responsibility, to let faith be something, THE thing, that carries us. To see that the church is more than a bottomless trap for energy, time and money. It's more than just a place to socialize or a place that exists to make us feel better about ourselves, but rather a community of the faithful. A community of disciples. A community of cross carriers. A community of people who are being carried by Jesus. A community whose identities are being transformed by being together and who are called to work together to let the world know about this good news of giving up and letting go. As Jesus calls out these crowds today Jesus reminds us of just who is doing carrying. Jesus reminds us that the cross carries us.

He reminds us that His love for the world, His grace for sinners, His triumph over death all found on the cross are what can truly carry us and lift us up. Jesus tells the crowds and us today that it was He who was the first to give up everything. So it might be a good idea to take Paul's words to the Philippians to heart and let the same mind be in us that was in Christ Jesus who, though He was in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, humbling Himself becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. **That** is the way of discipleship, knowing that it's not about what we carry but about who carries us.

Thanks be to God.

Amen and amen.