

In this morning's gospel passage Jesus is addressing the crowds that are following him. They've seen his healings, the miracles, heard his teachings and disputes with the religious authorities. Now he wants those who think that they want to follow him to realize that following him requires putting the demands of living into God's Kingdom before anything else in their lives. It means to love God and love your neighbor. It means risking and doing things that you may not want to do because it goes against the cultural norms.

Jesus begins by telling the crowd following him that, "*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.* (Luke 14:26) Jesus is using hyperbole to get his point across when he uses the word 'hate.' Matthew in a parallel passage has Jesus telling the crowds, *Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.* (Matt 10:37, 39) If you are going to follow Jesus nothing should get in the way of doing what God desires you to do with your life. Earlier in Luke Jesus had told the crowd that family are "those who hear the word of God and do it!" (Luke 8:20-21) Discipleship will challenge our attitudes and priorities in life. Jesus doesn't want some of our life, he wants all of it! Discipleship is a daily choice to follow Jesus. It is a life long transformation. Discipleship is knowing that all is a gift from God.

In Psalm 139 this morning we heard, *O LORD, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.* God already loves us and knows who we were created to be and it may not be who our culture or ego is telling us to be! Jesus may be asking you to change a personal relationship, vocation or commitment to financial resources, anything that is holding you back from being the person you were created to be by God. We have to be willing to be changed and sent in a different direction.

I have a friend from Indonesia in Virginia who was a college professor but felt that God was calling him to help international students who were coming to the United States and attending his university. He prayed talked with his family and decided that he would work full time for a Christian organization that had built a dormitory near campus to house, feed and support the international students at the University. It hurt his family financially, but he is doing what God had called him to do as he helps the international students who have left families behind in another country to attend college. He constantly speaks of the peace and joy he and his family are experiencing as they help these students. I know that some of you sitting here support educational or service organizations in your home countries out of your resources that God has given you.

Jesus says, *So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.* It is not about becoming poor but using our material wealth for God. It is about putting God's desires first in our lives. What we own can come to own us, that is what we need to avoid. Ignatius, the founder of the Jesuits wrote a prayer that I say everyday. He wrote, *Take Lord and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding and my entire will. All that I have and call my own. You have given all to me. To you Lord, I return it. Everything is yours; do with it what you will. Give me only your love and your grace, that is enough for me.* God already knows us better than we know ourselves. Jesus challenges us to grow as his followers. To be willing to be changed.

In Jeremiah this morning we heard how God is the potter. Jeremiah following God's instruction *went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him.* (Jer. 18:3-4) The scene is a metaphor for how God interacts with God's people. God works with the clay for the desired outcome, he doesn't force the clay but molds it, if the clay resists it becomes misshapen and will have to be reworked. The passage is about how God brings about change to bring a hopeful future for God's people. God has been working with us as Christ the King to bring into being something new as we have been part of the Vitalization Cohort project since January of 2020. Jesus calls us not just as individuals but as his church to be willing to change and be transformed as God the potter worked the clay as seemed good to Him. We are not the church we were in 2019 before the pandemic and we are not going back to that church. God has called us to change, we now live stream our services so that those beyond our building can participate in worship. We have met with Denise Trevino-Gomez to discuss and develop a new mission and vision for Christ the King. The Innovation team discussed and revealed what are the church's strengths in our diversity and what is holding us back from living into God's desire for Christ the King. Diversity is our strength but also our challenge as we seek to grow as a church and follow Jesus. Jesus calls us to put our allegiance to him before that of our country or ethnic group. In following Jesus there is no 'us' and 'them.' There is only an inclusive 'we' as the Body of Christ. As Paul wrote to the church in Galatia, *There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.* (Gal 3:28) But as Jesus told the crowd it requires surrendering all to Jesus. Do we have the courage to go where Christ is calling us as his church? It probably will not look like what any of us expect. One church that I was at stayed open for Christ's desire for them and ended up building a 2.2 million dollar Family Life Center with an independent African American Church because they had the land and the other church had the finances. The Diocese was skeptical that the partnership would work, but God had a plan. Both churches had come up with the same idea for a Community Center, but neither could do it on their own. It was only when they were willing to work together to help the neighborhood that God's plan was revealed and became a reality. The two churches have continued to work together and God's blessings have flowed out to the community through those churches working together as one Body in Christ.

If we are going to live into God's dream for Christ the King we will have to let go of the concepts of 'my group', 'my money.' We are Christ's church and the resources we all have are to be used for the good of the whole church and our community. Esp. in American culture where it is all about the individual, Christ says that it is about following him in the company of other disciples. Christianity is a communal faith as Paul wrote in his letters. We are all one Body in Jesus Christ our Lord.

This morning let us recommit ourselves to following Jesus Christ and surrendering all to him as we pray: *A Prayer of Self-Dedication*

Almighty and eternal God, so draw our hearts to *thee*, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly *thine*, utterly dedicated *unto thee*; and then use us, we pray *thee*, as *thou wilt*, and always to *thy* glory and the welfare of *thy* people; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. *Amen.*