

Proper 18 C
Luke 14:25-33
September 4, 2022

“Sign Me Up!”
Rev. Dr. Brandon S. Perrine

²⁵Now large crowds were traveling with him; and he turned and said to them, ²⁶“Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, spouse and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. ²⁷Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, ³⁰saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ ³¹Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³²If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace.³³So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

~o~

As of Thursday, when I finally got around to writing my sermon, footballer Cristiano Ronaldo is the most followed human being on Instagram with over 477 million followers. Khaby Lame tops TikTok with over 142 million followers. Barak Obama leads Twitter with 132.9 million followers. Why? Why do we follow these figures? One promises to make followers drool with photos and videos of a super talented athlete and style icon. Another lures with laughter, silently spoofing over-complicated life hack videos. And the third posts thank-yous,

encouragement, and presidential wisdom. I wonder, how many followers do you think Jesus would have with a tweet like “My followers all end up hating their families,” or a pic of a smiling disciple carrying a cross, or a video of Jesus lip-syncing “Let It Go” while throwing money out the window. Would you follow him?

Up to the finger-wagging rant we read about today, Luke’s author tells us that Jesus never really had trouble attracting a crowd. In fact, he put on a darn good show! Audiences had come to expect miracles, healings, exorcisms, and free food. He tells amusing stories, infuriates the authorities, and has a nice bit about the coming realm of heaven. According to our text, people aren’t just coming out to see him when he’s in town or doing a show, he’s attracted groupies who are following him from place to place. And that’s when he turns: “Want to be my disciple? You have to hate your family, carry a cross, and give away everything you own.” Sign me up, right?! It’s not hard to imagine some of the groupies dejectedly dropping their heads, turning around, and shuffling back from whence they had come.

Christians have struggled with this text for a long time. Scholars appropriately group it among Jesus’ “hard sayings.” It’s hard to be this person that Jesus describes. It’s hard to be this disciple. We do try though, don’t we? We try to prioritize Jesus’ way, but it’s tough with kids that depend on us, or a spouse that deserves our attention, or ailing parents or siblings. We don’t hate them. We could never hate them. And while we don’t literally carry crosses around, we all know something about sacrifice, don’t we—about the cost of following Jesus?

Each of you adults sitting here today could be sleeping in, or brunching with friends, or doing a hundred other things. Each of you busy kids could be catching up on your favorite show, or texting with friends, or doing homework. Each of you who serve on a board or committee, at New England Church or Our Savior Lutheran, or support your church financially, or volunteer, or sing in the choir, or teach Church School, or attend adult studies, women’s fellowship, or other programs have clearly

identified church as a priority and you make sacrifices to follow Jesus' way. You know that the Christian life isn't always "cheap" to live—there are costs to being a follower of Jesus. I guess it's good that he made it clear up front.

Jesus tells his followers plainly what it costs to be his disciple and it's simple: it costs *everything*. It's all-encompassing. And it's a pretty big commitment. It's really not hard to imagine some of the groupies that day dejectedly dropping their heads, turning around, and shuffling back from whence they had come. Maybe that's why Jesus had so many followers and so few disciples. But what if that's exactly what he intended?

In her book *Leaving Church*, Episcopal priest and author Barbara Brown Taylor writes:

I think it was his way of telling them to go home. He did not need people to go to Jerusalem to die with him. He needed people to go back where they came from and live the kinds of lives that he had risked his own life to show them: lives of resisting the powers of death, of standing up for the little and the least, of turning cheeks and washing feet, of praying for enemies and loving the unlovable . . . [T]hey eventually found their ways back home, where they started local chapters of the Friends of the Disciples, and to everyone's great surprise that turned out to be enough.¹

Most of us aren't called or equipped to be disciples. At least not like the ones Jesus was describing. Though he spoke in hyperbole about hating their families, most of us aren't called or equipped to put our families on the back burner or not have one at all. Most of us will never be called on to carry a cross or pay the ultimate price for our faith. Most of us, while knowing that the cost of being a disciple is the renouncing of all wealth and property, find that simply paying the cost of following is all we can afford: resisting the powers of death, standing up for the little and the

¹ Barbara Brown Taylor. *Leaving Church: A Memoir of Faith*. San Francisco: Harper, 2006.

least, turning cheeks and washing feet, praying for enemies and loving the unlovable, as Taylor describes it. That's still a big job—a big price.

Friends, that's exactly why we do it together. Christian community, church, is how we share the cost and distribute the load. It's how we nourish and care for one another and make sure that no follower collapses in the road and doesn't get back up. It's how we who are not disciples, live and love and serve like Jesus in the world.

During little Luna's baptism a few minutes ago we promised our love, support, and care to her and to her family. That's the same promise we make to every person we baptize—the same promise we make to each other, baptized or not. The Church is made up of those who are very young and those who are very old and all those who are somewhere else on the spectrum. The Church is made up of people from all walks of life. The Church is made up of people who've had different experience, and have different political ideologies, and different theological beliefs. And that's all beautiful and rich and good because the Church doesn't represent a way of believing. Christianity doesn't represent a way of believing. It represents a way of being. We are communities that love and support and care for one another as we follow Jesus in living and loving and serving in the world.

Thanks be to God for companions on the journey, for fellow followers, for friends of the disciples. Sign me up for that. Amen.