



Lectionary 23, Year C

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13th Sunday after Pentecost: Gospel Text – Luke 14:25-33

Luke 14:25-33

²⁵ Now large crowds were traveling with [Jesus], and he turned and said to them, ²⁶ "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. ²⁷ Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸ For 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? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, ³⁰ saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' ³¹ Or 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? ³² If he cannot, then while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. ³³ So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions."

SERMON TEXT:

When was the last time you thought deeply about the words you pray when you recite the Lord's prayer?

When was the last time you really spent some time with these words and what they mean for your life and the life of the world?

The Lord's Prayer has got to be THE most widely known prayer across all of Christianity...said weekly by millions if not billions of people.

At nearly 50 years old, the words of the Lord's prayer have probably left my lips around 2000 times...if not more.

The words of the Lord's prayer are extremely important words, and they carry an immense amount of weight because these words came into the world after being first spoken from the very mouth of Jesus Christ himself.

When was the last time you took a moment to let the words of the Lord's prayer really sink in...?

"YOUR kingdom come, YOUR will be done, on EARTH as in heaven."

Let me speak that again...

"YOUR kingdom come, YOUR will be done, on EARTH as in heaven."

Have you ever really considered what we, among the millions and maybe billions of other voices, are asking for when we pray THESE words each week?

I mean, ask yourself...how well does the way human beings have structured and arranged our existence reflect who we understand God to be?

Does the culture around us, with its siren call to do more, be more, and get more reflect who we understand God to be?

Does our political system, with its divisive "us vs. them" rhetoric reflect who we understand God to be?

Does our engagement in the violence of war, where innocent children are often counted as collateral damage, reflect who we understand God to be?

Does our treatment of the most vulnerable people among us...the poor...the houseless...people struggling with addiction...refugees...anyone on the margins...does our treatment of these folks reflect who we understand God to be?

So, when you pray...when we pray...when millions or maybe billions pray... "YOUR kingdom come, YOUR will be done, on EARTH as in heaven..." are we really aware that what we're asking God to do is rearrange our entire existence?

Are we really aware that what we are asking God to do is change all the stuff that we have structured and arranged in our lives and in this world that is not in alignment with God's will...?

...which I would argue is pretty much everything...

When we pray "YOUR kingdom come, YOUR will be done, on EARTH as in heaven" we aren't praying for a nice idea to EVENTUALLY occur...no...we're instead inviting... asking... pleading even...with the creator of the universe...capable of making anything and everything happen...to make this happen TODAY!

We invite/ask/plead for God to bring God's kingdom to us TODAY!

Not later...not when we die...but NOW.

We invite/ask/plead for God's will...not ours... to be the driving force in our lives and the world...TODAY!

Not later...not when we die...but NOW.

And we invite/ask/plead for all of this to happen so that the EARTH and everything in it can exist and behave the same way heaven exists and behaves...TODAY!

Not later...not when we die...but NOW.

We pray the Lord's prayer...alongside each other in our families, our congregations, across the country, and all over the planet...and I wonder just how often we give these words the space in our hearts, our minds, and in our lives that they deserve...

And I wonder...if we really grasped what it is we're praying for when we pray this prayer...if some of us would choose to stop...because the change these words invite is too great for us to bear...too inconvenient...too discomforting...too threatening...to how we'd rather go about living our lives.

And I find myself wondering, instead of switching our brains into that mode where we sort of automatically recite the words of the Lord's prayer without a lot of thought...what if each time we prayed the Lord's prayer...we took a moment to truly assess our readiness to commit to the words we're about to say...and the ways in which we are inviting God to act?

In today's gospel reading from Luke chapter 14, I think Jesus is encouraging the crowd that has gathered around him to practice this kind of an assessment.

This crowd...is surely made up of people INTERESTED in what Jesus is up to. Curious folks trying to figure out who this Jesus is, what this Jesus is about, and whether or not they are going to become active participants in this Jesus movement...as disciples.

And Jesus takes a moment to speak to them in their discernment because he wants to make it crystal clear that being a disciple comes with a very real cost...

He wants them to know that they have to go ALL-IN to be a disciple...

...That there are no half-measures...

...that discipleship does not ask for just one hour a week...but rather every hour of every day for the rest of their lives.

When two people are squaring off against each other...working up toward a fight...have you ever heard that phrase "You want a piece of me?" The best response I've ever heard to that phrase is the response, "I don't want a piece, I want the whole thing!"

Jesus is trying to make it clear to the crowd...and to us today...that discipleship requires more than just a piece of us...but rather it requires ALL of us.

Jesus 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."

Jesus says, "Whoever does NOT carry the cross and follow me CANNOT be my disciple."

Jesus says, "None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions."

So to be a disciple...requires us to turn away from all the trappings of this life...including people we hold most dear...and put God first...

To be a disciple means we have to carry the burden of the cross...embracing the same spirit of sacrifice Jesus demonstrated...up to and including the point of death.

To be a disciple means that we must detach ourselves from ALL the stuff we have accumulated and cherish...the stuff that distracts us from the work Christ calls us to do.

Take that in.

Process it for a moment.

It's a big ask.

It shouldn't be taken lightly.

In the verses from Luke chapter 14 that immediately precede today's reading, we encounter one of my favorite parables...The Parable of the Great Dinner.

In this parable, a host puts on a great dinner and invites a bunch of people.

When the meal is ready, the host sends out one of his slaves to let the invitees know that it's time to gather.

But it turns out that all the people that were invited...make excuses for why they can't attend.

One of them shares that they have just bought a piece of land, and that they need to go see it.

Another says they have just bought some oxen for their farm, and that they need to try them out.

Another, and my favorite of the bunch, states, "I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come."

Upon learning that all who had been invited had decided not to attend, the host tells the slave to go out into the streets and bring in anyone able and willing to come...especially the poor, and those with disabilities or infirmities.

Friends...Jesus is being clear about the cost of discipleship...because discipleship requires us to SHOW UP for the meal Christ has prepared...to be present for it...to prioritize it in our lives...and to prioritize sharing it with the rest of the world...as many people as we can possibly find.

Jesus isn't looking for folks who can squeeze out a little time on Sunday morning...but rather Jesus is looking for folks who know that loving God and loving our neighbor at all costs...even to our own detriment... is how we are called to live...

and Jesus is looking for folks who are ready to live out THAT call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

That's discipleship.

That's what it looks like to be part of the coming of God's Kingdom TODAY!

That's what it looks like to relinquish control to God's will as we become active agents in the ways God's will is done...in this moment!

That's what it looks like to be a part of God's work bringing glimpses of heaven to Earth...in the here and now.

Discipleship is exciting...it's also terrifying...and it is most certainly costly...

Now...if you're like me...if you've given yourself a moment to really take this in...to process what sometimes we glance over...and really hear the words of the Lord's prayer...as well as the words Christ speaks to us this morning about discipleship...

If you are like me...you might be wondering if you're truly ready for all this...and maybe...if you're even worthy enough to be a part of it.

And here's the truth...you...me...and the millions and billions of other people of faith...none of us are ready... but all of us...ALL OF US...despite our lack of readiness ...are recipients of God's love and forgiveness nonetheless...

This gift of grace that is poured out on the cross through Jesus Christ...the resurrection and new life that is promised to us through Christ's own death and resurrection...

The Good News is that the cost that comes with being recipients of all this...has already been paid...whether you're ready or not...and despite all our failings and foibles...Jesus Christ makes us worthy receivers of this gift.

So now...all we really need to discern as we take a moment to truly process what it means to be a person of faith...a disciple...committed to Christ's work...

All we really need to discern...is if we're willing to live our lives like people who have received this life-changing, world-changing gift...and get busy sharing this cost-free gift...the best thing that has ever happened to us and for us...with EVERYBODY else.

"YOUR kingdom come, YOUR will be done, on EARTH as in heaven."

May we gladly invite/ask/plead God to go about the work of rearranging our existence...and may we all embrace the life-altering way of discipleship...so that God might use us to be a part of the coming of the kingdom...the doing of God's will... and the Earth behaving like heaven...TODAY.

Amen.

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