

15th Sunday after Pentecost
23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time
Sunday, September 5, 2010

GOSPEL: Luke 14.25-33

25 Now 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, 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.

25 Συνεπορεύοντο δὲ αὐτῷ ὄχλοι πολλοί, καὶ στραφεὶς εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτούς· 26 εἴ τις ἔρχεται πρὸς με καὶ οὐ μισεῖ τὸν πατέρα ἑαυτοῦ καὶ τὴν μητέρα καὶ τὴν γυναῖκα καὶ τὰ τέκνα καὶ τοὺς ἀδελφούς καὶ τὰς ἀδελφὰς ἔτι τε καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἑαυτοῦ, οὐ δύναται εἶναι μου μαθητής. 27 ὅστις οὐ βαστάζει τὸν σταυρὸν ἑαυτοῦ καὶ ἔρχεται ὀπίσω μου, οὐ δύναται εἶναι μου μαθητής. 28 Τίς γὰρ ἐξ ὑμῶν θέλων πύργον οἰκοδομῆσαι οὐχὶ πρῶτον καθίσας ψηφίζει τὴν δαπάνην, εἰ ἔχει εἰς ἀπαρτισμόν; 29 ἵνα μήποτε θέντος αὐτοῦ θεμέλιον καὶ μὴ ἰσχύοντος ἐκτελέσαι πάντες οἱ θεωροῦντες ἄρξωνται αὐτῷ ἐμπαίζειν 30 λέγοντες ὅτι οὗτος ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἤρξατο οἰκοδομεῖν καὶ οὐκ ἴσχυσεν ἐκτελέσαι. 31 Ἡ τίς βασιλεὺς πορευόμενος ἐτέρῳ βασιλεῖ συμβαλεῖν εἰς πόλεμον οὐχὶ καθίσας πρῶτον βουλευέσεται εἰ δυνατός ἐστιν ἐν δέκα χιλιάσιν ὑπαντῆσαι τῷ μετὰ εἴκοσι χιλιάδων ἐρχομένῳ ἐπ' αὐτόν; 32 εἰ δὲ μὴ γέ, ἔτι αὐτοῦ πόρρω ὄντος πρεσβείαν ἀποστείλας ἐρωτᾷ πρὸς εἰρήνην. 33 οὕτως οὖν πᾶς ἐξ ὑμῶν ὃς οὐκ ἀποτάσσεται πᾶσιν τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ ὑπάρχουσιν οὐ δύναται εἶναι μου μαθητής.

Choose!

+ *In nomine Domini. Amen.*

It's the same old game ... we have to choose ... every day, every hour, every minute, sometimes every second.

When I arose this morning I had to choose about my tea ... whether I was going to put the requisite two bags of *Barry's Tea* (the only tea I really like to drink (it's the best Irish Tea of course ... I always carry an emergency ratio of 4 teabags in my shoulder bag) and the only way I can begin a Sunday morning ... whether I was going to boil the water and put the two bags of Barry's into the teapot *before* I went outside and said my morning prayer and fetched the Sunday issue of the *Santa Fe New Mexican* ... or do it all when I came back inside the house.

The next thing I had to choose, while enjoying my tea, was whether I would take out my checkbook and write my offering to the congregation for just this Sunday ... or make the offering up for four Sundays ... the Sunday I forgot because I was getting ready to leave after services on

the next leg of the Great West Coast to East Coast Bicycle Trek, the two Sundays in between, and of course ... Today.

And then there was the matter of the Sermon ... which for better or worse always comes together (as disconnected as it seems to me) in those few early hours before I drive over to our church and begin the Sunday Services.

And finally, of course, there was the choice of actually coming to worship.

It's like the story of the man who was still in bed long after he had to leave for work. His wife came into the bedroom and asked him why he was not heading out to his office this morning ... to which he replied, "I don't want to go to work."

"Why not," she asked.

"It's too hard," he answered, "there's always too much to do, never enough time to do it, and besides I have to deal with all those other people, listen to their needs, help them get through the day ... and I have to speak in public before groups ... and then there are the phone calls, the email, the letters ... and I know there're all talking about me ... I just don't want to get up and go this morning."

His wife looked at him and said, "But you have to get up and go to work. It's Sunday morning, and you're the Pastor of the congregation!"

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Toward the end of the 3rd Century CE, some 1,800 years ago, a man woke up one morning and wrote a letter to his friend Donatus ... here is part of that letter:

This is a cheerful world as I see it from my garden under the shadows of my vines. But If I were to ascend some high mountain and look over the wide lands, you know very well what I would see: brigands on the highways, pirates on the sea, armies fighting, cities burning; in the amphitheaters men murdered to please the applauding crowds; selfishness and cruelty and misery and despair under all roofs. It is a bad world, Donatus, an incredibly bad world. But I have discovered in the midst of it a quiet and holy people who have learned a great secret. They are despised and persecuted, but they care not. They are masters of their souls. They have overcome the world. These people, Donatus, are the Christians—and I am one of them.¹

The times were difficult, if one was a follower of Jesus, and persecutions were the constant reminder of the consequence of making a choice to be that. At the end of 256 CE a new persecution of the Christians under Emperor Valerian I broke out, and both Pope Stephen I and his successor, Pope Sixtus II, suffered martyrdom at Rome. The man who wrote that letter to his friend Donatus was Cyprian who had become a follower of Jesus and was chosen to be the Bishop of the church in Carthage in North Africa. When the new persecution began to advance beyond Rome, Cyprian courageously prepared his people for the what was coming and himself set an example when he was brought before the Roman proconsul on August 30, 257 CE. He refused to sacrifice to the pagan deities and firmly professed Christ.

¹ Cyprian, 3rd Century Martyr

For that he was banished, then brought home, served under house-arrest, then imprisoned, and finally executed.

Somehow my quandary over tea-bags does not compete with the story of Cyprian the Martyr. And somehow my decision to choose to remain a follower of Jesus does not bring the government inside these walls to place me (and you) on trial.

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Toward the end of the 1st Century CE, the Gospel Storyteller we know as Luke ... facing persecution of an earlier Rome ... took part of the story of Jesus from Galilee that he knew from some of the sayings of Jesus that had been written down over the last 50 years.

Luke formed a scene where Jesus, being followed by large crowds, stopped and turned to those who were following him and spoke to them about what it really meant to do that ... what it really meant to follow him.

The sayings of Jesus version of the story is much shorter and to the point ... it's about the symbolic language of taking up one's cross and carrying it ... the eventual conclusion of Jesus' life by his crucifixion, was for the followers of Jesus in the end of the 1st Century a real possibility for themselves as well.

So Luke takes the sayings of Jesus and forms them into a memorable scene ... and yes the word "hate" in English is a pretty bad way of conveying the Greek of Luke ... Luke is reaching into the roots of Judaism where from the Hebrew concept of making a choice about what one eventually loves more than anything else ... a better way to say it is "loves less" not "hate." So ... *Whoever comes to me and does not love family and possessions and all the cares and distractions of the world less ... will have an almost impossible time being a disciple of mine.*

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We look at this story and think of our own discipleship ... or we should! Far too often we want it to be as easy as getting out of the car in the church parking lot and coming down those steps and walking inside this welcoming congregation and having a good experience at worship and maybe a cup of coffee afterwards (and perhaps a chocolate covered potato chip ... if the Pastor obliges at the 9 o'clock Discussion Time) and then going home to our Sunday afternoon leisure.

But ... it's never that, is it? Discipleship is more than an easy faith ... and much more than a personal favour from God. Jesus never called his followers into a personal piety (by the way, the best answer to the question when someone asks you "Is Jesus your *personal* Saviour?" ... the best answer comes from my friend Nicole Garcia in Denver ... she told me she always answers, "Jesus my personal Saviour? Why no, I want to share him with everyone!") ... Jesus never called his followers into individuality ... but into the community.

That is, we live in the world of our neighbors ... some of whom are in desperate need ... and we (the community of the faithful) are called to love them ... think of that the next time you're standing in line at Trader Joe's™ ... consider that those around you, just like you, are trying to achieve happiness, might be dealing with grief and sorrow, and maybe are wondering if they will have employment when they leave the store.

And our loving of neighbor, says Jesus, goes beyond even what we can see in front of us ... it extends to the whole world ... we say today ... the globe. Yes, it's easy at 7,000 feet to think of our own needs and not imagine the devastation of global climate change upon the people in Pakistan who suffer from floods ... and yet, they are our brothers and our sisters and if we are able to share something also with them ... to alleviate suffering humanity ... that is part of our discipleship too.

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The Story of the Apple

An example of choosing to follow the oldest commandment of faith (loving God and loving neighbor) is right here in my hand this morning, this red apple.



For some time now two congregations here in Santa Fe who had known each other for many years began to do things together that were visible signs that pointed to the depth of things below those signs: compassion, caring, respect, understanding, peace, fellowship, and especially love.

Those two congregations were Christ Lutheran Church and Temple Beth Shalom.

You know that at the conclusion of the Yom Kippur fast (this year on September 18) our congregation provides the *Break the Fast* food for our brothers and sisters at Temple Beth Shalom.

And each Christmas, Temple Beth Shalom provides the beautiful Christmas Wreath that hangs above our Altar for the Christmas Eve Masses.

And ... each February, on the Festival of Tu B'Shevat (the 15th of Shevat, the time of planting of trees, sometimes called Jewish Arbor Day), our two congregations plant a tree on each other's grounds in alternating years.

Five years ago, our congregation provided an apple tree and together with members of Beth Shalom, we planted that tree in the front yard of the Temple ... this apple is the result of that effort ... it is literally the *first fruit*.

Rabbi Schwab gave it to me last week saying, "You know there is this ancient tradition of offering the *first fruit*!" I thanked him saying that it was a good thing that we didn't have to sacrifice or slaughter anything, except perhaps by this symbol ages of distrust, animosity, and misunderstanding. And together this weekend we are telling the Story of the Apple in our congregations.

You see, it does take time before we can see the result of our labours – this fruit took 5 years of care – but it is there and it does happen ... with patience and care and a lot of work.

Just so the results of choosing to follow the Holy One who calls us into living for each other ... *in the world of our neighbor* ... the results are there and do happen and when they do ... it brings

what God has intended all along, life in abundance, life in love, life in all the fullness and beauty intended at Creation.

On our side of the text, we call that the *Gospel*. On either side of the text, we call it faith active in loving. May it continue, and may we continue to choose that faithful, active, loving, life. Amen.

Deo Gratias (+)
The Rev. Benjamin Larzelere III
Pastor, Christ Lutheran Church
Santa Fe, NM