

Trinity Lutheran Church
September 4, 2016
Text: Luke 14:25-33

Grace, mercy and peace from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

As I sat and prayed about this sermon, I kept wondering, "What will be on the minds of the members of Trinity Lutheran Church as they come to worship today. Will they be thinking about how they will enjoy the three day weekend? Will they be thinking about worshipping God? Then, I read and reread the email/letter which Pastor Mamy sent to the members of Trinity this week. The letter announcing his acceptance of a call to Journey Lutheran Church in Onalaska, Wisconsin.

I do not know about you but I was shocked when I learned about Pastor Mamy's acceptance of the call. Even though I knew he was exploring ways to be closer to his daughter and granddaughter, I was surprised in the sense of being sad for the members of Trinity Lutheran Church. Pastor Mamy has served here for four plus years. It seems like his ministry has only begun.

Then, I remembered the wise words of Rubin Willers, an elder in the church I served in Lake City, MN. It was one of those egotistic moments in my life when I was taking credit for the growth and lively ministry in the church. Rubin appropriately blew up my self-inflated ego when he said, "Pastors come and Pastors go but the congregation remains." Rubin reminded me that the people of God will continue on with or without a pastor.

With all of these thoughts in mind, I read the gospel lesson for today. A large crowd was following Jesus. With rather blunt words, he addressed the crowd. "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." In softer words, he asked the crowd, "Do you realize what it means and are you able to pay the price of being a disciple?"

I cannot help but think Jesus said this to separate the curious from the serious, to let them know that he was not going to Jerusalem to establish an empire but to carry his cross. He knew the pain, the heartache and the sacrifice that love for him would demand. He knew a crown of thorns awaited him and that the crowd was thinking more in terms of a crown of gold. Therefore, he confronted them right away with the cost of discipleship.ⁱ

I sort of wish Jesus had not said, "hate" your family, etc. The word hate has such a vicious, negative connotation and meaning in our present society. The point Jesus is making is to draw a contrast between that which one naturally holds dear and the cost of being a disciple.ⁱⁱ "It is simply to stress the seriousness of taking the journey with him to Jerusalem."ⁱⁱⁱ

Jesus was asking the question, "Could you, if need be, exercise more love for me than even your own family? Jesus was asking the large crowd to rethink their priorities. Would Jesus, the son of God, be first in their lives?"

Barbara was a college friend. One spring day in our sophomore year, she invited me to attend her wedding which was to take place in a few weeks. I explained that I would not be able to attend. She responded,

"I know what's important to you. First, it is God. Second, it's baseball. And third, it is women. And, I am a woman.

"Jesus wanted deliberate dedication, not reckless resolve. He wanted clear-eyed deliberation, not a flood time of emotion. He wanted real disciples willing to experience the depth of love he could offer, not distant, superficial followers."^{iv}

Jesus was not offering the gift of life at bargain rates, discounted prices, or on sale. Indeed, "if you want to be followers of mine," he said, "be prepared to pay full price for there may even be some hidden costs we don't know about until we take the journey together." Whoever is to follow Jesus cannot be his disciple unless they love him more than all that life seems to offer.

This is what Rubin Willers understood and told me in my egotistic moment. It is Jesus first, then family, work, church, etc. It seems to me that Jesus is saying to the members of Trinity through this Gospel lesson. Put God first and all the other concerns and worries will work themselves out.

One way we put God first is when we gather to worship God in this beautiful place of worship. When we put God first, everything else we need will be provided. Putting God first does not mean that there will be no bumps in the journey. But, we have the assurance that we will never walk alone.

ⁱ Paul Ajello, Jr., Wilkensburg Baptist Church, Pittsburgh, PA in Church Management – The Clergy Journal, May/June 1989. P. 41.

ⁱⁱ "Holy Hating" posted by Mark Davis

ⁱⁱⁱ Commentary on Luke 14:25-33 posted by Emerson Powery

^{iv} Paul Ajello, Jr., Wilkensburg Baptist Church, Pittsburgh, PA in Church Management – The Clergy Journal, May/June 1989. P. 41.