

I've got my clipboard right here so that all who want to can sign-up to be a disciple of Jesus. You heard the criteria in this morning's Gospel: hate your family, carry a cross, calculate the cost, and give up all your possessions. Who's ready to sign-up? Any takers? No takers? Are you waiting until you get home so you can take the time to calculate the cost? Look - no one's on this list! Wait, **I'm** not on this list! Jesus' demands aren't very attractive or compelling are they? We wouldn't want to use this particular passage in bringing people to Christ would we? As a sales pitch, it doesn't do very well. Hearing this passage, why in the world would anyone want to be a disciple of Christ? This must be why scholars call this one of the "hard sayings" passages.

This passage is so difficult, it makes you wonder whether Jesus really means this. The better question is "what does Jesus mean by this?"¹ For you see, Jesus is using a 2' x 4' to get his message across. He's using the rhetorical device of hyperbole - exaggeration if you will, to get his point across. He wants us 'to sit up and take notice.' He wants our full attention. He wants us to go beyond the excitement and emotion of his signs and

¹ Mark Rolls, "Pastoral Perspective," *Feasting on the Gospel, Luke Vol. 2*, Cynthia A. Jarvis & E. Elizabeth Johnson, eds., (Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, KY) 2014, 76.

wonders. What Jesus is asking for in his disciples is an utter transformation from the ways of the world to the ways of God. What are the ways of God? Love God and love our neighbor. The ways of God are far more rewarding and they endure. The ways of the world can be enticing, attractive, short lived and ultimately meaningless in the long run. Which way will we choose?

Let's take a look at each of the four criteria and examine what Jesus means. In order to be a disciple, we must 'hate' our family. That's strong language. In using such strong language, Luke's Jesus is urging us to consider that when we turn our backs on the ways of the world and chose the way of God, our family becomes the community of the other Disciples. Certainly this new family can include those with whom we are related by blood, marriage or adoption. The question here is really one of fidelity; our ultimate loyalty must always be to the Kingdom of God.²

Jesus is aware that love of family is a virtue. Yet, like all virtues, it can be taken to such an extreme that it is no longer a virtue. For example, if we know a family member is in denial about an illness, or is engaging in other harmful behaviors like abuse or some kind of addiction and we fail to

² Ibid.

name it and confront it, we are enabling that family member. Sometimes the only healthy thing to do is to leave. In these situations, we have to be able to evaluate whether our choices reflect Kingdom values or the world's values.

Next, Jesus says we have to carry a cross to be his disciple. This was a very real possibility for Jesus and like prophets of old, he was headed to Jerusalem and to near certain death. Legend has it that none of the Apostles died of natural causes; all died for their faith, for insisting that God's way was better than the Empire's way. Before the third century, martyrdom was not an unusual result for following Christ. Being Jesus' disciple can mean being willing to lose one's life. As used in Luke's Gospel, there is a more than literal interpretation. Elsewhere in the Gospel, Luke has Jesus say "take up your cross daily," and by this he means, every day turn toward God and whatever the world offers that is not of God - turn your back on it. In other words, die to those things that do not promote the life that God has promised.

Next, Jesus advises us to coolly and rationally count the cost of discipleship. Losing our life prematurely is a possibility, but for most of us in this room, not likely. Certainly advocates for justice and peace, both of

which are consistent with God's Kingdom, can pay the ultimate price.

Anwar Sadat, Mechim Begin (sp) and Martin Luther King readily come to mind as those who paid with their lives their efforts to create peace or justice. Most of us are not called to that level of discipleship. Yet we are all called to something.

Perhaps using the language of business or economics might be better here. Instead of simply "cost" think of "opportunity costs" or doing a "cost/benefit analysis." Those of you who are parents know full well that it isn't inexpensive to raise a child. You are all too aware of the sacrifices you have made for your children. You have also known anxiety, fear and suffering as the result of being a parent. And yet - you have also known great joy because you have been a parent. We all hope that the joys of being a parent exceed the tribulations and being a parent contains both joys and tribulations. So does being a disciple.

Some of us are given exceptional gifts and are called to be an artist, a musician or an athlete. I was reading in the Enterprise of a St. Mary's College graduate who seeks to play professional basketball. I don't understand the path to professional basketball, yet the article made clear that the path wasn't straight forward, there were lots of difficulties and

obstacles, and involved living in another country and learning another language, all for the opportunity to play professional basketball. Being true to what God calls us to be comes with some sacrifice and some costs as well as moments of joy and pure bliss. Both are reality.

Whatever our call is, we probably do not chose the suffering that comes our way and if we knew about it in advance, we'd probably do all in our power to avoid it. Yet when suffering comes, we are able to endure it because we are assured that Jesus is always with us, and we are supported by our family and faith community. Often these sufferings lead to growth opportunities; opportunities that in hindsight have enriched us. As a consequence, while we would have preferred not to have had to endure it, we are glad of it because it makes us the person we are now.

Finally, Luke's Jesus tells us to give up all our possessions. Remember Luke is the author of what we now know as two books: Luke and Acts. The arc of both is the high value Luke puts on the Christian community and its communal nature. The earliest Christians held all things in common, all had what they needed and none had personal possessions beyond what they wore.

Our reality is quite different from that early First Century Christian life. What I think we should hear is don't let our possessions possess us. Don't let "our stuff," get in the way of living the life God means for us to have. Relinquish our attachments to those things in this world that offer false security and do not enhance the value of our lives. We do this because we have trust in the promises of God. We do this because what Jesus offers is more life giving than what our culture offers.³

So this is our bottom line: Jesus is asking for a mature, clear-eyed, well-reasoned decision to be his disciple. He is clear that while there are rewards and great joys in being His disciple, there are also costs associated with it, including sacrifice and suffering. Go into this with our eyes wide open, know in advance that the path of discipleship is demanding and not easy. And know that we never walk the path of a disciple alone, we do it in community and we do it with Jesus, for Jesus is always with us until the end of the age.

This reminds me of the hook to a Mary Chapin Carpenter song, "it's too much to expect and not too much to ask." Jesus is asking us to be his

³ Raymond Pickett, "Exegetical Perspective," *Feasting on the Gospel: Luke Vol 2*, Cynthia A. Jarvis & E. Elizabeth Johnson, eds., (Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville KY) 2014, 77.

disciple; are we willing to thoughtfully consider it? I've still got my
clipboard...

AMEN.