

Sermons at Christ Church

Reaching Out in Faith.

Pentecost 20

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‘Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ Asked a man who ran up to Jesus while Jesus was about to start a journey. Jesus reminds the man that he knows the commandments and then quotes that commandments for the man.

The man responded with these words, “Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.” But then Jesus responds, there’s one thing you lack-discipleship.

The one thing that the man lacked isn’t different from what you lack and what I lack-discipleship. We all lack that one thing, and because we lack that one thing, we are always restless.

Why was he restless? Why are you restless? Listen to St. Augustine *‘You have made us for yourself O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.’*

Until our hearts are in tune with what God is calling us to be-disciples, until our hearts understands true discipleship as an absolute dispossession, it will continue to remain restless because it is looking at the wrong place for the respite that it needs.

Many of us feel empty within. We feel this deep hunger for God and the things of God. We crave some meaning, some purpose, some fulfillment, anything at all that would help satisfy our restlessness.

I have a divorced friend who desires to re-marry because she feels that the absence of a spouse not only diminishes who she is but there’s this vacuum in her life that must be filled by another person. But I keep reminding her that there isn’t any vacuum, you are not an empty tea cup that must be filled, and marriage certainly wouldn’t offer you the fulfillment that you crave for because that is not what marriage is about. More than that, no human being can ever fill that empty space.

She often sounds to me like the man in the gospel story. He believed he was missing something in his life. His desire wasn't to live a long, long life without the possibility of death.

I read a story about people taking anti-aging medicines so they can live a little longer. That wasn't what this man was asking for. His desire was to live eternally with God, be with God, collapse into God, be fulfilled in God and be united with God. He knew that it was God who offered eternal life and he wanted a part of it. But his question was to know what it is that he must do to have a part in this God.

Jesus pronounces a list of the law and the man responds, I believe, with some exasperation, I have done all these since my youth. Been there, done that. So what next? Tell me something that I don't know but I need to know so eternal life may be my portion. What more do I have to do?

The more that he asked for, which we all lack, is the risk of discipleship. Hear Jesus, "You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me."

The cost of discipleship lies in the ability to sell all, to lose all, to give all, to die to all and to tolerate no condition that might come between Jesus and your obedience to his call. The cost of discipleship is to risk all for the sake of the kingdom.

If you consider the commandments that Jesus quoted, you will come to find out that in fact, it doesn't cost us anything if we decide not to steal or commit murder. It doesn't cost us anything if we honor our mothers and fathers.

Like the prophet Amos said, if we decide not to trample on the poor and take from them levies of grain, it wouldn't cost us anything. If we decide not to afflict the righteous, take bribe and push aside the needy, it wouldn't cost us a thing. But we cannot help ourselves because these are the very acts that give us some semblance of relevance and power. Understand this, the cost of discipleship is enormous.

It is costly and risky because it requires us to do more than the usual stuff, the mundane and the routine that has become rote and which brings neither fulfillment, meaning nor the assurance that any effort on our part in keeping the law amounts to anything.

Many of you are familiar with the story of Job. Here was someone who kept the law and was considered righteous and full of integrity. His friends could not understand what had happened to Job.

Many believed in Job's society that material possessions were a sign of God's blessings, that's why Job's friends believed that Job had done something to warrant this punishment from God.

After all, God was a just God who does not inflict punishment on the just. Job complains bitterly because he thought he had done nothing wrong. He then says this, if only I could secure audience with God, I would make my case to him that I have done nothing wrong.

If you compare the story of Job and the man in today's gospel, you will find out that both men kept the law. So why is Job suffering from material loss and bodily pain and the man also suffering from inadequacy and emotional distress? What's being challenged is the belief that the mundane keeping of the law was sufficient. And that by simply keeping them we satisfy our sense of responsibility to God and neighbor.

But the gospel text is inviting us to do something different, something more than the routine keeping of the law, the text is calling us to costly discipleship.

Remember, Jesus didn't invite the man to be a Christian nor does he invite us to be Christians, he invited him to discipleship-sell what you have, give the money to the poor and come follow me-discipleship. In that same way does he call us into discipleship, follow me.

A disciple dispossess himself or herself of all things material and becomes one with those over whom he or she may have exercised power. A disciple values the enduring relationship with the God who gifts him or her with life and so places ultimate value on that relationship.

St. Francis uses the word *cumber*-which means to make something more difficult or burdensome-to describe the possessions that often possess us, hold us captive like the man in the gospel story and renders us incapable of being true disciples.

What Jesus asked the man to do was to be unencumbered-free yourself from what possesses you, free yourself from what you believe defines you, free yourself from your power, free yourself from material goods, free yourself from injustice, and free yourself from anything that stands between you and your desire for true discipleship.

Anyone can be a Christian, but can anyone be a disciple? Can you be a disciple? The path of Jesus is the way of the cross, and it demands daring, active and self-risking faith. True discipleship is costly because it did cost Jesus his very life. But it is also full of grace because it provides you and me with the only true life that no one can take away from us, whether in life or in death.

There's a story of a lady who unfortunately had a heart attack. But while on the operating table she asked God, 'God, is this it? Is this what all this is about? Is this how my end is going to be?

God responded that, no, you have forty more years. But soon after her recovery, she decided to stay in the hospital, had a major face lift, tummy tuck, and more. It was an extreme makeover. When she eventually checked out of the hospital, she was walking down the street when she was hit by a car and killed. She got up to heaven and said to God 'I thought I had forty more years.' God shook his head and said 'I'm sorry I didn't recognize you.'

During Eucharist, we are invited to confess our sins. The confession takes into account what has been done and left undone. There are many things we do and many more we are supposed to do but don't do. If you ask me, the question that Jesus appears to be asking the young man is, what have you left undone? What is it that you are supposed to do but haven't done? And when he was confronted with what he had left undone, he walked away.

The question is, what motivates you? What drives you? Two answers; is it love of money or love of service? If it is love of money, then indeed, it would be difficult for the camel to go through the eye

of a needle than for a rich man to go to heaven. But if it is for the love of service, the love of discipleship, then you clearly understand the cost of discipleship.

Truth is, Jesus doesn't invite us to sell everything we own, rather, he invites us to reconsider where our true allegiance lies.

We are in our stewardship season, and each of us is being invited to consider a generous pledge towards our life together. It is another form of discipleship. It is costly and risky. But it represents God's claim on our very own lives.

It is worth doing because we understand that discipleship entails the surrender of one's whole self- to serve, to give, to fight, to toil and to labor. And those who embrace this costly risk of discipleship understand where life's true meaning and fulfillment lies. **Amen.**