

truly matter in life. Our family, our comfort and our stuff. Jesus says, think again. How do you come into this world? Naked. How are you going from this world into the kingdom of God? Naked.

The third verse of the hymn “Rock of Ages” gets it right.
Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress,
Helpless, look to Thee for grace:
Foul, I to the fountain fly,
Wash me, Savior, or I die.

Why do we struggle with this so much? Why will so many hear this message and say, well, then I’m out? Because it’s a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a living God. So much of our efforts of the western church over the last few generations has been designed to say that what goes on here isn’t really that important. At best, our faith is a nice little topping on your carefully crafted life. It won’t ask much of you, you won’t have to change very much, you can carry on as you are.

But when God makes demands like these and we are forced to reckon with our own neediness, our own depravity, and our own limitations. The holy trinity of the good life – family, comfort and stuff can’t give us what we want most. We need God for that.

The modern world naturally turns us in on ourselves. But our pursuits for happiness from within always results in just more anxiety, fear and selfishness. We need something from outside us. We need something to bear the weight of our neediness.

What’s the antidote? How do we find true contentment? We need a saviour. We need a God, who we couldn’t have thought up on our own, to reach into our lives and turn us not inward but outward.

We need a God who says, yes, your family is lovely, your own leisure pursuits are nice, and your stuff is amazing. Now, let it all

go – because I have something more for you. His name is Jesus and he will fill your deepest voids, meet your greatest needs and give you your life’s greatest purpose.

And if you do, the world will look at you, happy in a way they never thought truly possible, and say, “There’s something about these people.”

“I walked away because the demands seemed to great...but look at them now. They are living like all that other stuff didn’t really matter as much as we all thought it did. Maybe discipleship is truly worth the cost. Maybe discipleship is worth everything.”

Thanks be to God, Amen.

“Known For It: All In”

May 26th, 2024 — Selby United Church — Scripture: Luke 14:25-35

By Rev. Mike Putnam

A few weeks ago, Gary Jackson came to me with a real problem on his heart. “Pastor” he said, “I’ve got a problem.” “Oh, really, Gary, what’s that?” I responded with great compassion and pastoral love. “Well, every week I arrive at church and there’s no good parking spots left. It’s bumper to bumper all down Church Street and all the way down Pleasant Drive. The Playhouse parking lot is jammed packed. It didn’t used to be like this – I could just pull up right in front of the church five minutes before church and get a good spot. I’m not happy!” he declared.

“Well, Gary,” I said “I’m sorry, I know that parking is a bit of an issue these days and I know you like to show up last minute and you want a good spot right out front. But listen, in a couple weeks – on May 26th – I’ll be preaching a sermon that I think should really take care of that problem. After that, you’ll have the pick of almost any spot you want.”

And I said that because I knew this was the week, I’d be dealing with Luke 14. This is the passage when Jesus has a large crowd in tow – his ministry is really taking off. He’s becoming one of the most popular preachers in Galilee. But then he preaches a sermon about three really hard things to hear.

It’s a strange way to begin a movement – You’d think he’d want to keep the crowd as large as possible for as long as possible. But here, Jesus seems to be culling the herd.

You know, sometimes I’ll go to a concert or a big sporting event and look around at the swarming crowds and think, where are all these people on Sunday morning? Wouldn’t it be something if 16,000 people would not just show up to see the Leaf’s play, but they’d go to church?

But then, not much is required to be a fan. Anyone can cheer for their team – I mean ticket prices aside – watching millionaires on ice is a pretty low commitment way to spend your time. No wonder it’s so popular – they do the work – we drink beer and eat hotdogs. It takes almost no effort to be a fan.

But Jesus isn’t looking for fans. Jesus is looking for disciples. Fainthearted attachment to Jesus isn’t it. Cheering from the sidelines isn’t it either. Jesus wants us to follow in his demanding way.

Just a chapter earlier Jesus addresses this issue head on. Someone asks, “Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?” Jesus doesn’t get into the ratios or the math, but instead he answers essentially saying, don’t worry about everyone else, worry about yourself. “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to...”. He says, “They will say, “We ate and drank with you and you taught in our streets.” But I will reply, “I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from me...”.

Jesus isn’t looking for fans. He’s looking for disciples.

So, what is it that distinguishes a disciple from a fan? Well, this morning Jesus gives us three markers of a true disciple - three things that people should be able to see, and say, “There’s something different about you people. These people are odd in how they arrange their lives.”

And so, this morning Jesus gives us three things that undermine everything we thought was most important. Because so often we say the most important things in life are family, leisure and my stuff. That is the holy trinity of the good life, isn’t it! If you have those three things you have been blessed.

Master those three things and life really can't get any better. And to that Jesus says, what is your faith worth to you? Because if you want to follow me – if you want to enter through the narrow gate - you're going to have to let all of that go and be open to the expansive reality of life in the kingdom of God.

Jesus says, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple."

People often say, "I'm not so sure that Jesus was God, but I do think he had some wonderful teachings." "Hate your father and your mother," Jesus says.

But in a culture like ours, dominated by "family values," where we have nothing better to command our allegiance to than our own blood relatives, this is one of the most challenging things the church does for us.

In baptism we are rescued from our families. As good as our families may be, defining our close-knit group by those who look and act like you will never do. So, in baptism we are adopted into a family large enough to make our lives far more interesting.

But that's a difficult word from the Lord! Why such hyperbolic language? Well, because Jesus isn't looking for fans. He wants to upset our natural proclivities for settling into the mundane structures of life. He wants the church to blow open the doors on his love. And begins by redefining our family.

The love of a disciple of Jesus must be so great that the very best of earthly loves, when compared, will seem to be hatred in contrast. People will see how we treat virtual strangers like family and say, "that's really something..."

And now the crowd begins to thin a bit...

Next Jesus says, "And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."

You see, faith in Jesus is not self-indulgent. Faith is not about what you get out of it. You may like having something to do on Sunday, you may like feeling like you're loved and your appreciated and people know your name. But that's not ultimately what it's about.

The church is where you get to refine your faith and put it into action – giving you a venue to serve, to love and to engage. This is not one more consumer product – "Well, I enjoyed the music today but the sermon didn't really speak to me in my own context." No, this is not a comfortable country club where you enjoy the benefits of membership.

The question is, "Do you have the metal to follow Jesus?" Jesus says, "You want to follow me?" You must first die. That's what baptism represents. You are drowning your old self in the grave of death and you are taking on a new identity as a person who has been saved. Take up your cross and die, Jesus says. That's the only way to follow me.

And the crowd gets a little smaller... Finally, Jesus says, "In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples." Okay, Jesus, that's hitting us where it hurts. Is nothing sacred? Not our stuff!

In Mark's gospel there's a great little story of a man who stops Jesus and asks a deep theological question: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" One version of the story describes this person as a "ruler" and another says he was "young". All agree that he is "rich."

At first Jesus brushes him off with, "You know what the scriptures say – obey the Ten Commandments."

"I've obeyed them since I was a kid," replied the man. Never broken a commandment? Who can actually make such a claim? This guy is not only adept at accumulating wealth, he's also adept at self-delusion!

Then Mark states, "Jesus looked at him and loved him." - It's the only time in scripture where Jesus says he loves a specific individual. And this love results in Jesus making one of the wildest demands ever made of anybody. Jesus told him, "Go and sell all you have, give it to the poor, then come follow me."

With that, Mark said the young man got depressed, got in his Lamborghini and sped off, leaving Jesus to lament, "It is very difficult to save those who have lots of stuff"

Jesus could have very easily gotten into a debate about heaven here – but he brought it down to the imminently important problem of our stuff. Rather than being lured into an abstract dialogue about the afterlife, Jesus forced the man to talk about obedience and action. Jesus didn't urge the man to "dig deep within himself for the answers to life's biggest questions" – a rather popular way of avoiding our own propensity for sin, but he gave him only clear and direct instructions – "Go...sell...give...follow me."

And the crowd got ever smaller... What does it cost to be a disciple. Oh, see that's how we get you. You can just come for free. It doesn't cost anything. But if you want to get the yearly eternal subscription, that's going to cost you everything. Every part of your life is going to have to be subject to Christ. He gets it all.

There's an old story about the cost of discipleship. There once was a man who dearly wanted to become a disciple of Jesus. So, the man asked God, "how do I do it, what will it take?"

God responded, it's easy...but it will cost you. "That's fine, I am very serious about this, what does it cost" asked the man. "It costs a great amount," answered God. "Well, do you think I could afford it?" "Oh yes, everyone can." "Well, how much is it?" "Well, what do you have?"

The man thought about it. "Well, I have \$5,000 in the bank." "Good, I'll take that." "I have some RRSP's, RESP's and a few stocks

and bonds." "Good", said God, "I'll take those too. What else do you have?" "Well, that's all I have."

"Where do you live?" asked God. "I have a house." "Oh, I'll have that." "But then I'll need to sleep in my camper." "Oh, you have a camper, I'll take that too." "We'll then I'll only have my car." "No, that will be mine too," said God. "Do you only have one car?" "No I have two." "Good, I'll take both."

"Well then, you have taken everything my family and I have." "A family?" God said. "You have a wife, and children?" "Yes," he answered, "Well they will need to be mine too." "We'll I alone am left said the man." "Oh yes, I forgot" said God, "I want you too."

"This is what it will cost if you want to be a follower of Jesus," God said. "But for now you look after these things for me. But when I want any of them or all of them, they belong to me."

This is what it means to follow Jesus. It is to commit everything you have – every gift you have received – and be willing to give it back to God. To give it back to God in service and generosity to others.

People want to board the airplane to heaven on their own terms. Ever flown anywhere lately? When you enter that airport, you don't call the shots anymore. From security – where they pull your stuff apart, to the stewardess who says "if it doesn't fit in this little box it's not going on the flight". And that guy says, "Well, I've travelled with these 43 bags before and I'm doing it again."

No he's not! You don't call the shots in an airport. And friends, to be a follower of Jesus requires us to give up our self-determined proclivities too.

Today, the crowd gets smaller and smaller. Jesus is fine with that. It's a narrow gate – he doesn't want problem at the boarding terminal. So, this morning Jesus hits us where it hurts.

We think there's three things that