

THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

MATTHEW 10:24-39

Text only, no in-service worship due to COVID-19 Pandemic

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As I prayed about this text, so many of what is happening in this world kept coming into my mind; the increasing number of COVID-19 cases around the country, the rioting in the streets across America, the large crowd demonstrations demanding change in civil rights, Supreme court decisions and our own conditions to not allow in-house worship. However, Jesus said so much about this situation and how we should act as disciples.

A little background; Jesus had been traveling through all the towns and villages teaching and preaching the good news of the Kingdom of God, and as He entered these towns and villages He was deeply moved because He saw so many folks who were “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

Many of these folks did not even know that anyone loved them, let alone God. Don’t you know that he is in our streets even today thinking the same thoughts.

But if only someone would show them Jesus’ love—it would change these person’s lives! We are challenged today for the very same reasons.

So Jesus looked at the crowds of people and He spoke to His disciples saying, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

And the first “workers” who Jesus sent were the 12 apostles.

Here are some of the instructions Jesus gave them, “As you go, preach this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven is near, heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons’...In other words, “Get ‘messy’ with the people.”

Then Jesus told them not to take any money along with them, but to trust in God.

He also warned them that they would be persecuted, flogged, and arrested. And in verse 26 of our Gospel Lesson Jesus says, “Do not be afraid of them.”

And Jesus tells those who go out into God's harvest field that everything and every way their lives once were will be knocked on its ear!

Because Jesus' message is so new, so radical, that it will change all existing structures and ways of thinking, even some that are most cherished and ingrained. So many people today are predicting that after this Pandemic and the civil unrest, we will have a "NEW NORMAL". And when the new order brought about by Jesus' message confronts the old order of things—a clash will take place!

There will be conflict! It is happening in our very midst!

There will be chaos! It is happening in our very midst!

Some folks may have to choose between following Jesus and staying in relationship with parents and other family members. So many are today are losing family members and friends in order to follow Jesus...that can be an extremely painful cross. These first disciples, what did they lose? They not only lost their family and friends. They became separated from their own people. They became separated from the Jewish race.

Jesus tells us in John Chapter 15; "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.....No servant is greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also."

There is a big difference between being a fan of Jesus and being a follower or apprentice!!! A fan is not required to do much. But a follower is a high roller!

Jesus says in verse 39, "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

If we are going to be followers of Jesus Christ, we can forget about playing it safe!

Christianity is an extreme sport, and there are no spectators—only players!!!

If you like to be comfortable and not think too much about the troubles of your neighbor—Christianity is not for you!

If you only want to hang around folks who are 'just like you,' instead of sitting with the beggar, those on the margins, those who might not have had a shower in a while then Christianity is not for you!

Christianity is ‘messy business.’

Jesus says, “anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.”

This means, to be a follower of Jesus Christ means that we will not only endure inconvenience, but rather, like Jesus, we must be willingly choose to sacrifice everything, including family and life itself, to be a true follower!

Does that sound like something you are interested in? That is the Cost of Discipleship

Our Arkansas Annual Conference was held on Saturday via ZOOM connection this year. Bishop Mueller talked about the difference between falling in love with Jesus and staying in love with Jesus! Staying in love takes work. It takes practice. It is something we must be very intentional about. It is like a marriage.

One day—some 27 years ago when I accepted God’s call into the ministry, I came to understand what Paul meant when he wrote in Ephesians Chapter 2:8-9, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is a gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”

Even the ability to have faith is a gift from God, and we are called to act on that gift!!!

Believe me, to throw that gift away is a perilous and miserable thing!

Being a Christian is not about playing it safe.

It means we are willing to risk losing everything we have, everything we know—all that is comfortable for the sake of Christ!!! But in place of that we find our true selves.

In place of all the other stuff—we find REAL LIFE!!!

We find meaning, and we find something that the world is lacking greatly—REAL PEACE, REAL PURPOSE, REAL LOVE, REAL FREEDOM, REAL HOPE!!!

A little later in Matthew’s Gospel Jesus says, “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field.

When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls.

When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.”

Have you found the treasure of following Jesus and sold all you have in order to have it?

Jesus looked out at the people and as He did he was deeply moved.

They were “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

They had no defense against the wolf whose only intent is to maim, kill and destroy.

So he sent the disciples out to them.

Today in Greers Ferry Arkansas Jesus is looking out at the people, and Jesus is deeply moved.

He died to save them. He brings the Kingdom of God to them.

And He sends us out with this message: “The kingdom of heaven is near, heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons, freely you have received, freely give.”

“Do not worry about money. If you do what I ask, your needs will be taken care of”.

You will run into all kinds of trouble because the kingdom of God is so new, so radical and it will challenge all pre-existing structures and ideas. But when it is embraced—it will change the world!!! It is the only hope and you are the messengers.”

Are we willing to sacrifice everything for the sake of others? Are we willing to sacrifice everything for the sake of love? Following Jesus is dangerous, but it’s worth the risk!!!

Billy Graham has said, “Salvation is free, but discipleship costs everything we have.”As a vital congregation, we must give it all we have! Amen.

Let us Pray: Gracious, Heavenly Father---We praise your Holy name and thank you for being our loving savior and sustainer. Thank you for responding to our needs in our community and for providing us rest. Lord, when the problems and trials of the world overwhelm us, you remind us of your faithfulness. Help us to trust you and be the disciples you have asked us to be. Please answer our prayers this very day for the sick, loss of loved ones, hungry, homeless, upcoming medical procedures, civil unrest and those who do not know you. Dear Father, help us to finish the works of our hands by your grace. May we never leave undone the work you have given us. Open our eyes so that we can see and appreciate all you have provided us. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen!