

Sermon Title: *Intentional Discipleship*

Luke 14:25-35

²⁵ Now large crowds were travelling with him; and he turned and said to them, ²⁶ ‘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. ²⁷ Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸ For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, ³⁰ saying, “This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.” ³¹ Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³² If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. ³³ So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

³⁴ ‘Salt is good; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? ³⁵ It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure heap; they throw it away. Let anyone with ears to hear listen!’

During my time as a student at Goshen College, I spent a number of weekends in the winter months volunteering at Camp Friedenswald, a Mennonite camp about 45 minutes north of where I went to school. I would volunteer during winter retreats they held for Jr and Sr high school students. During one of those weekends I met a guy from a near-by church who came with his youth group, a vibrant guy who went by the name Moose – I imagine he had a lot of fun with his youth group. Moose liked to tell stories. And one particular story I remember had a moral to it. Moose told us that he used to have some Faith related bumper stickers on his car – bumper stickers like “Real Men Love Jesus” or “Know Jesus, Know Peace.” But Moose, self-reports being an angry driver – an aggressive driver – a driver that might cut you off or flip you the bird. So, Moose got thinking about his driving and his bumper stickers – he wondered about the message of this, what is it like to get cut-off by someone, only to read, “Real Men Love Jesus” as you slam on your brakes.

And so Moose said, I began thinking about this, and I knew I had to make a change – I knew something had to change. And so he took the Jesus bumper stickers off his car.

This is not a joke. That is a true story. While Moose made a change, I don’t think we would call it the level of transformation. While this might seem obvious to us, I think this story is such a good example of *how we compartmentalize our idea of discipleship*, how we can convince ourselves that being a follower of Jesus only influences certain pieces of our life – that it has nothing to do with other parts, say for example, how we drive – if we yell and honk and swear at

someone for not using their turn signal or driving slow in the passing lane. Is our call to discipleship a call to a transformed life, or just to remove the bumper stickers?

Jesus says we cannot be his disciples unless we hate our families, carry the cross, and give up all our possessions. This does not exactly seem like the preaching recipe for ‘church growth.’

As so often happens wherever Jesus went, large crowds showed up. And now the large crowds are following him, *Luke* says these crowds are traveling with him. All these people have shown up and have kept following – they are intrigued and want more; they are bubbling with enthusiasm about this potential deliverer. This crowd wants to get close, they want to feel his energy – they want to get caught up in his spiritual leadership – they want to be part of changing the world with him. But, Jesus seems to think that they don’t know what they are asking – they don’t know what it costs. Why does he say all these disturbing things about hating their parents, children and their own lives?

It is impossible to know to what extent Jesus is meaning this – is this more a figure of speech, trying to get us to truly see what our priorities must be if we are going to seek to follow Christ? Or, does he mean it even more starkly than this? Jesus does, after all, call his disciples to come and follow him – leaving their former careers and families behind. And he does tell at least one other potential follower to sell all he has and give it to the poor – he seemed to mean this literally when talking to him. And 11 of the 12 disciples end up losing their lives in similar fashion to Jesus. So, perhaps it is not just a figure of speech.

At the very least, this passage reminds us that Jesus is not merely asking for all parts of our lives to be transformed. Jesus is not a dualistic thinker, only concerned with your soul – Jesus does not say, “let the world go to hell, I just want your soul. He says, “let it be on earth as it is in heaven.” Jesus is asking for our whole self. Jesus is not just concerned with our Spiritual Life – Jesus is concerned with our whole life: our intellect, our mental and emotional life, our economic life, our sexual life, our political life, our business life, our family life.

This is the whole of my sermon – the whole of these past four sermons – to simply try and get us to ask ourselves honestly, *how is my concept of discipleship impacting all areas of my life? How is my seeking to be a follower of Jesus overlaying each aspect of my life?*

How does it impact the way I speak to my spouse? To my children?

How does it impact my political engagement? Or lack of?

How does it impact the type of employee or boss that I am?

How does it impact not just my financial giving, but all my spending?

These past few days, I have been so angry with our political system. I know I have the luxury of being white and male in a country where I expect my government to work – I know that the majority of people on this earth do not live in countries where they expect that. But I have been so angry. And I don't do well with anger. I do not consider myself an angry person, and I quickly shut-down when I am around people who are responding or speaking in anger. But I have been angry.

And there are generally two places where that anger is going to come out if I don't deal with it – on Jenna or playing soccer. Jenna and I play on a weekly indoor soccer league. And I

am a firm believer that athletic competition brings out the best and worst in people. I have embarrassed myself before at Boise Indoor Soccer, so while driving to my game on Friday night, I meditated on who I want to be – on how I want to be. On how, even on the soccer field, I want to be a person of love – I want to live a life of love. Those people don't know I am a pastor. But that shouldn't change how I am or how I live a life of love.

Am I a follower of Jesus on the soccer field also? In the scope of life, I realize that this seems like the smallest of importance – but it is just another small example of how I have compartmentalized aspects of my own life. Even as a pastor, where my work-life is all tied to this Jesus thing – I still have many areas that I prefer to keep under my control, and not allow the God I meet in Jesus Christ to have influence.

As Albert Borgmann says, our life is not divided up into religious moments and secular moments – there is not spiritual time and ordinary time – all life is infused with spirit and all life is ordinary. All life is one. And at least part of what Jesus is saying to this crowd and to us, is that he is asking for that whole life, in all its sacredness and all its ordinariness.

I think it is safe to say, Jesus would have been a bad congregational pastor. When he finally gets the crowd to come in the door, to follow – he doesn't say, “sit down, we have just what you need!”¹ We will engage you and entertain you, and we won't ask too much of you, only for somewhat regular attendance and a regular check.” Instead, he would probably greet the eager visitor at the door, asking, “Are you absolutely sure you want to follow this way of life? It

¹ Barbara Brown Taylor makes this point in her sermon, “High Priced Discipleship.”

will take everything you have, and if you are successful you might end up dead or at least in prison.”

If Jesus were a congregational pastor, I think he would be lucky to have even twelve. But of course, Jesus never cared one bit about numbers of followers – only about the kingdom of God; he never cared about a critical mass, only about transformed lives and a transformed world.

And so, as followers of Jesus, we live a transvalued life.² Where we live by different values than the rest of our world – by different economic, transportation values, sexual, national, and family values. The family values Jesus seems to be pointing us to are ones that say, no family member of mine is more important than the kingdom of God, meaning I can never take up arms to defend my own family member because they are of no less importance to God than the family member of someone in Iran or South Korea; that I cannot provide for my families economic well-being at the cost of the economic livelihood of families in Mexico or Venezuela or Honduras because their ability to eat is just as important to God as my child’s ability to eat.

As Barbara Brown Taylor says, Jesus words are not to threaten us. But Jesus wants us to know that this is how the world works, if we are transformed people working for a transformed world, we will be opposed. No one tangles with the powers that be and gets away unscathed.³

I think that is what Jesus wants us to know. Not threatening us. He is loving us, as usual – he loves us and cares about us enough that he refuses to lie to us. He refuses to say following me

² A term used by Stanley Hauerwas in his sermon on this text, “Hating Mothers as the Way to Peace.”

³ Also in her sermon, “High-Priced Discipleship.”

does not ask too much of you. He does not say, “my way just wants you to be a good person, to take care of your family and be a good citizen.” He wants us to know what it will cost if we truly seek to follow after him – it will take a whole new look at the world, a whole new set of values – a whole new way of life, in the kingdom of God. We cannot just peel off the bumper stickers, we have to keep moving toward transformation.

And so, how is your concept of discipleship impacting all areas of my life? How is my seeking to be a follower of Jesus overlaying each aspect of my life? What part of your life have you compartmentalized, still trying to keep it under your own control? This is the question of today – the question of this text?

May we be a people of transformed dailiness – in the spiritual and ordinariness that is each day. A whole people, living whole lives. That healing and hope might flow through us to the world. Amen.