

Luke 9:18-27

¹⁸ Once when Jesus was praying alone, with only the disciples near him, he asked them, ‘Who do the crowds say that I am?’ ¹⁹They answered, ‘John the Baptist; but others, Elijah; and still others, that one of the ancient prophets has arisen.’ ²⁰He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Peter answered, ‘The Messiah of God.’

²¹ He sternly ordered and commanded them not to tell anyone, ²²saying, ‘The Son of Humanity must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.’

²³ Then he said to them all, **‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.’** ²⁴For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. ²⁵What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves? ²⁶Those who are ashamed of me and of my words, of them the Son of Humanity will be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. ²⁷But truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.’

Romans 12:1-2, 9-21

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Then Jesus said to them all, **‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.’**

It is only the gospel of Luke which adds the word “daily” to Jesus’ words here, which, of course make this command all the more difficult.

In his book, *Biography as Theology*, Jim McClendon tells a tense story of two prominent southern brothers, the Jordan brothers. Clarence Jordan, who was founder of *Koinonia* Farm near Americus, Georgia. *Koinonia* Farm (where Paula Bachman spent many of her growing up years) was created to be an interracial community before most people knew what civil rights were. Clarence Jordan himself was a pacifist as well as an integrationist and thus was not, I hear, a very popular figure in Georgia for much of his life, even though he came from a prominent family.

The *Koinonia* Farm, by its very nature, was controversial and at times faced trouble from those in the community who did not want the farm to exist at all, let alone in their community. McClendon reports that in the early fifties Clarence approached his brother Robert Jordan (who later became a state senator and justice of the Georgia Supreme Court) to ask him to legally represent the *Koinonia* Farm in a legal matter. Robert responded to Clarence’s request:

“Clarence, I can’t do that. You know my political aspirations. Why, if I represented you, I might lose my job, my house, everything I’ve got.”

“We might lose everything too, Bob.”

“It’s different for you.”

“Why is it different? I remember, it seems to me, that you and I joined the church the same Sunday, as boys. I expect when we came forward the preacher asked me the same question he asked you. He asked, ‘Do you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior.’ And I said, ‘Yes.’ What did you say, Bob?”

“I follow Jesus, Clarence, *up to a point.*”

“Could that point by any chance be – the cross?”

“That’s right. I follow him to the cross, but not on the cross. I’m not getting myself crucified.”

“Then I don’t believe you’re a disciple. You’re an *admirer* of Jesus, Bob, but not a disciple of Jesus. I think you ought to go back to the church you belong to, and tell them you’re an admirer, not a disciple.”

“Well now, if everyone felt like I do, did that, we wouldn’t have a church, Clarence, would we?”

“The question,” Clarence said, “is, Do you have a church now?”

Then Jesus said to them all, **‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.’**

This story of Clarence and Bob Jordan is a tough reminder to us that we, as a people who confess Jesus as Lord, are a people who are called to be disciples – not to just be admirers. It is a difficult story for me because it reminds me that there are places in my life where I am much more an admirer of Jesus than a follower. I think I am a bit more like Bob Jordan in many ways than I would like to admit to you or too myself, but I know my calling is to be a disciple in all areas of my life. This is what it means to be a Confessing Church, a confessing people, that we want to be followers of the way of Jesus in all areas of our lives, that we confess that Jesus is Lord of all areas of our life – *personal and political*.

Today marks the first Sunday of my fifth year as pastor here at Hyde Park Mennonite; the beginning of my fifth year here as pastor. I know that because it is the first Sunday of October, but I was reminded of this on Monday, watching a bit of the first presidential debate at the Bowman’s house on Monday night. While watching that debate, as I felt my stomach starting to slowly turn in knots, I had a vivid flashback to four years ago, taking a break from reading for

the very first sermon that I would preach here, to watch the first debate between Mitt Romney and Barack Obama. I remember having the same knots slowly turning in my stomach as I listened and became worried and anxious about what the outcome would be, about who would win and where we were headed as a country.

I know many of you, like me, find yourselves with a growing sense of anxiety as the elections get closer. Many of us feel increasingly powerless as the rhetoric cranks up on both sides, as we as an American people, feel fractured and unable to listen to one another. As we seem to be increasingly moved by fear as our primary motivation. And so, I want to speak today, to myself especially, a reminder that we are a people whose ultimate hope does not lie in the outcome of this election, but in the God of history.

I want to speak today, to myself especially, and to those knots in my stomach, a reminder that I am part of a Confessing Church, a people who believe that Jesus is Lord – no one else, no thing else; that my primary identity is not an ideology or political party, but as one who is called to pick-up my cross daily and follow Jesus.

I want to speak today, to myself especially, to the part of me that wants to paint those who have a different view than me with a single color, that sees them as enemy or as misguided – and remind myself that the good of one of us is dependent on the good of all of us – to remind myself of words from Walter Bruggemann that I quoted four years ago in that first sermon, that "The central vision of world history in the Bible is that all of creation is one, every creature in community with every other... All persons are children of a single family, members of a single tribe, heirs of a single hope, and bearers of a single destiny, namely, the care and management of all of God's creation." Our destiny is bound together.

And I want to speak today, to myself especially, to remind myself that no matter the results of this election, no matter what party is in power, our calling as followers of Christ is the same: to pray for our leaders and to speak truth to them as a prophetic minority – as a group of people formed in the shadow of the cross, our vision is not a perfect America, but the kingdom of God (a vision best articulated in Jesus’ ‘Sermon on the Mount’).

This is not to say that we do not care about the outcomes of elections or that we do not involve ourselves in the political process. Most of us, including me, care deeply about the outcomes of this coming election – that is what causes the knots in my stomach. The outcome of the election will have an impact on our lives, on our community, on the earth, and it will have an impact on people around the globe. Many of you here are involved in political arenas because they are larger systemic areas of justice and peace so closely tied to your calling as a follower of Christ. This week, for example, I spent all day Wednesday at the State Capital working with many others who are pushing state legislators to provide health insurance for 78,000 low-income people in Idaho. I do not do this because I enjoy it, my heart pounds and my back sweats speaking to law-makers and at press conferences. I do it because part of my role as pastor here is to speak to elected leaders – whoever they are – to urge them to work for large-scale change in ways that care for the vulnerable, that seek the well-being of all people, that seek justice.

Jim Wallis says that, **God is personal, but never private**. What he means by that is that our relationship with God is personal: we are at different places in our journeys of faith; God has called us to different things and in different ways; we seek God in different ways; we hear God in

different ways. But our personal journey, is not to be private – it is to be shared in word and deed – our personal faith calls us to action in the world. Our faith transforms us and thus, calls us to be a transformed people who seek to transform the world.

And we believe that this personal and public faith is symbolized in the cross – the cross which represents the way of Jesus – a way that did not align with any political ideology of his time; a way that challenged those in power; a way that challenged the ways of religion; a way that chose non-violence as the way of transforming the world; a way that did not seek political power. As people who live by this vision, we will always be a prophetic minority. No matter who is president or what party holds power, we will always be a minority because we live by a different vision – a vision that seeks to good of all the peoples of the world; a vision of *shalom* that seeks justice for each part of creation. A vision that seeks, like Clarence Jordan, to follow the way of Jesus, whatever might be the consequences.

In our current political culture, in our polarized society, it is a challenge to find our way through the current campaign environment as those *who both seek justice and are ambassadors of reconciliation*. It is a challenge to both be passionate about what we think is best for our country, to be honest about that – who or what policies we think will do the most good or be the most just – *and* be ambassadors of reconciliation. Remembering that the *shalom* of the each of us means seeking the *shalom* of the whole. This doesn't mean that we don't disagree with people, *even passionately disagree*, but we continue to refuse to label them as the "other." It means we refuse to demonize them. We continue to remember their humanity. We continue to

remember that they have an entire set of life circumstances that we cannot know which brought them to this particular point or view. And so we can disagree with passion, but also with love – also with still seeing their humanity. When you see a bumper sticker supporting a party or candidate that you don't, what is your feeling? What is your reaction? For me, there is often an initial reaction of disdain or judgment. Then, I have to check myself. I have to remind myself that they are not my enemy, they are not evil – to remind myself, that I do not know anything about them. I think this is one way we work at restoring our polarization, not by avoiding disagreement and passionate discussion, but by refusing to see people as “other”, refusing to see them as the enemy.

To conclude this time I am going to have us watch a brief video, just under two minutes of a sermon from Rev. Otis Moss III, he is the pastor of Trinity UCC in Chicago and is one of the more well known preachers in the US at the moment. I had the fortune of taking a class from him on preaching while in Chicago (you will notice some similarities in our preaching style).

This piece of his sermon, I have first found it before our last presidential election and I have found myself listening to it many times since then. It gave me a sense of peace. It gave me hope – it reminded me of my identity as a follower of Jesus – it reminded me that as people of faith, we must take the long-view of history. And since that last election, there have been times, when I began to feel overwhelmed at some of the political realities facing us in this world, and those anxieties have brought me back to this two-minute section of Otis Moss' sermon time and again.

It is a reminder to us, that we, as a church, we will continue on no matter the election results. Our hope will continue to be in God, not government. And I think this message is especially powerful coming from the Rev. Otis Moss III who preaches at a large African-American church, and so as you listen to him reminding us that we are still here as a people of faith – remember how terribly his people have been treated throughout the centuries in this land.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LaHv7ODynz4>

start at **26:35**; end at **28:18**

And so, let us remember that whoever is elected, whatever party is in power, we will still be here, confessing with our lives that Jesus is Lord. Whoever is elected, whatever party is in power, our calling will still be the same – to speak truth to power – to speak for the vulnerable and be a people of peace. Whoever is elected, whatever party is in power, we will often be at odds with the state and nation because Jesus is our Lord, because our vision is the kingdom of God.

May we strive to be a people who are not merely admirers, but followers of Jesus, that healing and hope might flow through us and to the world.