

Radical Community  
Luke 14:25-33  
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People are often afraid of commitment. We live in a multi-tasking over-stimulated world. Sometimes it's hard to commit to being somewhere 24 hours ahead of time because there are so many demands on our time that we feel the need to leave the window open for something to suddenly come up that we must be free to immediately attend to. And that's just one of our commitment-phobia scenarios. We might be afraid to commit to a relationship, afraid to commit to a lease, afraid to commit to a committee at church, afraid to commit to any number of commitments. The very word "commitment" might incite nervous stomachs or sweaty palms! Jesus asks for commitment. Disciple means follower and as we know, there is no follower without a leader. This commitment though, is different. It is a commitment to freedom.

When I think about what Jesus asks from us and what we get in return the commitment doesn't seem so scary. The language in this passage from our Gospel is difficult, I wouldn't dare stand up here and pretend that it's not uncomfortable or even a little scary. You might be sitting here hoping that I'm going to ease the challenge of it a little bit to make it more palatable in our commitment-phobia age. Jesus is preaching here about his expectation of his disciples. What does it cost a person to follow him? Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his famous book *The Cost of Discipleship*, says that following Christ must be costly because it cost God so much to show us how our relationship with God and our neighbor can and should be - namely the life of God's son. Following Christ cannot be cheap or we cheapen God's grace and God's relationship with us and our world.

Jesus outlines three particular costs in this passage: it costs loyalty, life, and possessions. A disciple of Christ is asked to think of the world as his or her family and not to value one's own "people" more highly than the poor, the oppressed, the other. A disciple of Christ is asked follow Christ's way to the cross – the way of speaking out against injustice, of healing, of threatening the powers that work against the kingdom of God. This way does not lead to a nice & quiet life; this way leads to the cross. A disciple of Christ is asked to give up their possessions because holding fast to money prevents one from holding fast to God.

I want to focus on the first of Jesus' costs. "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," he says. The Greek word here for "hate" is *mesei*. It means to hate, disregard, or be indifferent to. Now, growing up I was always warned that "hate is a strong word" and I certainly feel that it is stronger than "indifference." The point here, I think, is not that Jesus wants you to hate anyone, but that Jesus wants his disciples to understand that all people are equal in his eyes and he expects his disciples to have this same deep-felt understanding. I was talking about this passage with my dad, and I said, "Well, it means that I need to love Joe Schmo on the street as much as I love you." He was shocked. Sometimes we read or listen to Scripture like it's all very normal and expected. But talking about this cost of discipleship with my dad opened my eyes to just how radical an idea it is.

Jesus wants radical people following him, people who are willing to live in this world knowing their citizenship is in the kingdom of God, not in the societies they find themselves in. The kingdom of God is one radical community. I looked up "radical" in

the thesaurus just to see what kind of enlightenment it might provide to see some synonyms. I found: “complete,” “essential,” “vital,” “rebellious,” and “original.”

Absolutely.

You may know that my husband is a sports fan. So, naturally, we have a subscription to Sports Illustrated. One day I picked it up and discovered that I like one of the regular columns, the one on the last page by Rick Reilly. Usually the column is about something sporty, but there’s also usually some personality and something behind it – like a recent one about a youth sports club that is being threatened by a company wanting to put up luxury condominiums. Sometimes it’s not quite up my alley, but sometimes it is. I shared this story with my grandfather this past week and he said, “Well, I guess you have to be open to finding gems anywhere.” A few weeks ago the column was a wonderful example of radical community. A wonderful example of someone seeing their family stretch far beyond those they might find around a dinner table or in their Christmas card picture.

The story is a family whose teenage daughter killed herself. She seemed to have a lot going for her, including a family who loved her and a father she used to go running with. But she was diagnosed with depression and instead of the medication helping, it is probably what caused her suicidal thoughts. The family, in the middle of their unbelievable grief, made the decision to harvest her organs. Through her death, others had life, others used her eyes to see. And while that is part of what made this so radical, it’s not the end of it. The man who received her lungs was a non-smoker with lungs affected so much by disease that he could hardly walk around the block. He was a middle-aged man with his own family. When we received these new teenage lungs, he

knew he had to find the family of this teenager and thank them. Not only did he reach out and thank them, he brought them into his family and they brought him into theirs. This man started running with the girl's father, using the lungs that used to do the same in another body. The two men trained together and ran a marathon together. And all the while, the father could hear the lungs of his daughter breathing again.

I have no idea if this family is Christian or considers themselves disciples of Christ. And this man who received the lungs, I don't know about him either. What I do know is that their actions of generosity and outward-thinking at a time when our society would excuse them to look only inward is an example of the radical nature of discipleship. This mourning family saw an opportunity for other families to have new life. This recovering man with new lungs sought out the donor family and didn't just stop at thank-you but opened up his life to incorporate them into his inner circle. Jesus preached discipleship that invites everyone into your inner circle. Jesus' radical community has no limits, no boundaries, and no outsiders.

Only through trust in God, trust in Jesus whom we follow, are we able to make this kind of commitment. We are free from boundaries, free from disconnection with our neighbors, free from fear when we live in this way. The freedom of our spirits comes directly from our commitment to God. A commitment and trust that comes through grace, through prayer, through faith, through taking the risk of believing that God is who God says and will not ask us to do anything we are not capable of doing.

So, as cliché as it is, today's Scripture lesson is calling us to take a leap of faith. A leap out of the commitments that make us feel prisoner to our calendars or our extra curriculars or our work. A leap into the freedom to commitment to live in the kind of

radical community we are all seeking and yearning for. It is costly. And for freedom it's worth the cost.