

The cost of a Devoted Life

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Luke 9:51-62

Rev. Laurie Crelly, East Church

Grand Rapids, MI

“Foxes have dens and birds of the air have nests, but the son of man has no where to rest his head.” There is this restlessness in those words that are really haunting to me. I know Jesus is saying this to point out to the would-be disciple to follow me is not all glamor and glory as you may imagine. We have all had our starry-eyed dreams of being someone famous. I mean what kid has not dreamed of being a movie star, a famous singer or hero like a fire fighter saving lives. But those dreams are just that, dreams. The reality of such a life is also quite hard, rewarding, but also very hard and costly.

Now there is nothing wrong with having people to look up to or to have big dreams of being famous, but as grown adults we all know that such dreams often come with a big price. There is a dark side of being someone famous or harder yet, being someone who can create real change in the world like Jesus was doing.

Jesus was drawing all kinds of people to his side, and in the beginning, I imagine it was fun and thrilling. The teachings were inspiring, uplifting, and popular. The miracles were amazing and spell binding. Just a few verses earlier, Jesus was asking the disciples “who do people say that I am?” and we hear the big names of faith being lifted up saying that Jesus was the new Elijah or something. It is at this point that Jesus begins to get real serious. He begins to talk about going to Jerusalem and being killed. In Luke 9:23-26 it reads: “He was saying to them all, “If anyone wants to come after Me, they must deny themselves, take up the cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for My sake, this is the one who will save it. For what good does it do a person if they gain the whole world but loses or forfeits themselves.”

There is a cost to being a follower of Christ. Jesus has nowhere to lay his head is both figuratively and literally and each new prospective disciple that comes along he is reminding them of this cost. This is not all glitz and glamour as you imagine you need to know that there are many sleepless nights. You will be rejected by others; you will be seen as a threat to the powers of authority. This is a very lonely and difficult path to lead. Are you sure this is what you want to do? Time and again Jesus is saying there is a high cost to being my disciple.

Jesus has now “set his face toward Jerusalem.” When a Samaritan town heard this, they refused to offer Jesus and the disciples hospitality. They refused to fund the work in a way. Now it is a blow to one’s convictions and dedication when others think you are wrong and boycott your efforts. James and John, the sons of thunder, as they are called, are furious and want to retaliate and punish the town for not supporting the work of God. But Jesus rebukes them and moves on in search of another town to sleep in. There will always be people who don’t agree with the hard decisions others make. Jesus would not let his own convictions be dampened by a lack of acceptance by others. We don’t always know why someone refuses to support the decisions we make, but we should learn from James and John’s mistake here and not allow our self-righteousness to cause us to retaliate. Jesus did not make them an enemy, but accepted the reality that many would not approve or support Jesus in his ministry when it didn’t fit their expectations.

“Follow Me!” That is the call of Christ to others. But there are many competing demands of life on each of us. The pressures of family and society are strong, But the call of Christ demands to be first, demands that we seek life and the kingdom first, above all else. Like Jesus’ word in Matthew 6:33 “Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” This passage in Matthew is addressing the worries of life and reminding us to not allow the worries of life choke off the call of God on our lives. I think this is a similar message in Luke.

Other people's expectations on you are none of your concern. Jesus says again, "YOU GO and proclaim the kingdom of God."

The final demand of discipleship is a call to do so without regret. Don't look back and wonder what your other life might have been like. Jesus says, "no one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

In all this, Jesus is telling prospective disciples about the cost of Discipleship, the Cost of being a true follower of Christ.

1. We will be angered by the rejection of others to not support our cause, but that is not the nature of God to retaliate.
2. We will know the loneliness of the journey of faith, knowing that we will not find true rest until we rest in God.
3. The demands and expectations of the world around us will always challenge our loyalties but we are called to proclaim eternal life.
4. We must have no regrets. Once we have made the decision to answer the call we accept all that it demands our full devotion.

In all this, Jesus knows that the decision to commit one's life to Christ is not an easy or quick decision. It is a decision that will require one's full devotion and commitment. It could bring you a life of struggle, maybe homelessness, or even cost you your life. It is a choice that only you and you alone can make. Jesus' invitation is always there.

In wrestling with this text all week, I see that in all of this Jesus left the decision up to each individual. Jesus never forces anyone to take up their cross to follow him. Jesus got real with all those who said they wanted to follow him. He reminded them of all of the pain, suffering, struggle and danger that comes with such a decision. Jesus knew that not everyone would be ready for such responsibility and life changing decision. Yet Jesus does not punish those who abandon the call. Jesus does not allow others to retaliate, and Jesus does not shame anyone. In the end, time and time again Jesus respects the decision of the individual. The costs and joys of discipleship are high, and

Christ only wants those willing to weigh those costs and respond with an enthusiastic yes, "I have decided to follow Jesus."

This week has been hard as we see wildly different responses to the overturning of Roe v. Wade. After meditating on this scripture, I had to stop and realize that Jesus always respects our free will, our autonomy to make the hard decisions for our lives.

So I ask you this? Why would we think that God would support the decision of a government to take away a woman's autonomy to make the hard decision of carrying a fetus to term. A decision that could cost threaten her life. A decision that would alter the course of her life and could very well cause her and the child to live on the edge of poverty.

The decision to be a disciple of Christ is as difficult and as costly as the decision to become a parent and it should not be one that any of us make lightly nor are forced to make by others.

In area of medicine and ministry one is trained to honor and respect the autonomy of the individual and to honor their decisions even if we do not agree with them. On legal grounds we call it a living will and informed consent. It is one of the hardest and most sacred duties that I practice. It begins with listening deeply and honoring the person's convictions and God-given freewill without bias. Such compassion and love begins with listening deeply, setting aside my own personal convictions.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his book on "The Cost Discipleship and Living in Community" said this "The first service one owes to others in a community involves listening to them. Just as our love for God begins with listening to God's Word, the beginning of love for others is learning to listen to them. God's love for us is shown by the fact that God not only gives God's Word but also lends us God's ear. . . . We do God's work for our brothers and sisters when we learn to listen to them."

So I encourage us all to keep listening and loving one another in our common struggle to a seek a more perfect community and world.