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Proper 18C
Peace, Seattle
September 5, 2010 epk
Luke 14:25-33

Lord Jesus, you call us to be your apprentices. Teach us to listen to your voice above all others, and give us the will to follow. Amen.

TOTAL COMMITMENT

Someone once said, the difference between involvement and commitment is best illustrated by a breakfast of ham and eggs. In a breakfast of ham and eggs, the chicken is involved...
but the pig is totally committed.

The theme from our gospel this morning is total commitment.

By this time in Luke's gospel Jesus is really drawing the big crowds, and in every big crowd there are some who are curious, some who are skeptical, some who are casually committed, and some who are disciples.

So what does he do?
At the height of his popularity, Jesus steps to the microphone and announces to the crowd:

> WHOEVER DOES NOT HATE FATHER AND MOTHER, SPOUSE AND CHILDREN, BROTHERS AND SISTERS, YES, AND EVEN LIFE ITSELF, CANNOT BE MY DISCIPLE.
> TAKE UP YOUR CROSS AND FOLLOW.

A stunned silence envelops the crowd. You can hear a pin drop.
Can this be the same Jesus who welcomes sinners and brings hope to the hopeless?
The same Rabbi who said: LOVE THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF?
The same Teacher who spoke of a wayward son welcomed home unconditionally?

WHOEVER DOES NOT HATE HER FAMILY CANNOT BE MY DISCIPLE. Wow.

Even if, in a more nuanced reading of the original language, we could say it's more about <u>dishonoring</u> one's family than about "<u>hating</u>" them in an emotional sense, we still can't finesse our way around what Jesus says.

This text disturbs me. I love my family. What—am I supposed to give all that up?
Distance myself from the people I'm close to? Be willing to <u>dishonor</u> them?!

This is not the first time we've heard Jesus speak fiercely about family relationships.

Remember that time his family came after him—convinced, I think, that he'd fallen off the beam.
Remember what he said then?

> "WHO ARE MY MOTHER AND MY BROTHERS?" AND LOOKING AT THOSE WHO SAT AROUND HIM, HE SAID, "<u>HERE</u> ARE MY MOTHER AND MY BROTHERS! WHOEVER DOES THE WILL OF GOD IS MY MOTHER AND SISTER AND BROTHER." [Mark 3:31-35]

He not only rebuffed his own blood, he changed the very <u>definition</u> of family.
Jesus' words and actions go right to the heart of our deepest attachments.

- By whom will we be defined?
- By our families? Our careers? Our bank balance?
- Or will we allow God to tell us who we really are?

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Are we willing to admit that perhaps we've made idols out of some human relationships?
Is it possible that we have internalized relationships that are less than whole or healthy, and that we allow those negative relationships to define us?

Following Jesus means doing the hard work of disentangling ourselves from everything else, from all the other voices that seek to own or define us. It means admitting that we may have made false gods of our attachments; it means letting them go.[1]

WHOEVER DOES NOT CARRY THE CROSS AND FOLLOW ME CANNOT BE MY DISCIPLE.

Jesus tells this story with his face already turned toward Jerusalem, toward the cross.
He wants to know if we are going with him, or if he'll be going there alone.

BEFORE YOU SIGN UP, he says, UNDERSTAND THAT IT'LL COST YOU. COUNT THE COST.

Family Promise, a ministry desperately needed in our community, is on hiatus for lack of funds.
I'd like to think it's not because we who have roofs over our heads understand the plight of families and have come to the conclusion that it just costs too much to help them…

I'd rather think this ministry is on the edge because homeless families are simply too invisible to our eyes, and that if we really became aware of what it's like to be in that position, we would do whatever it took not only as individuals and congregations but as community and nation to see that these families were sheltered and fed and given access to the resources that would enable them to succeed.

Some of you read the series on family homelessness in The Seattle Times[2] last week, telling this story from the inside. And if you haven't already seen it, there's an interview in the West Seattle Blog[3] and another on KING TV[4] in which our own Laura Bermes—who serves on the FP board—along with former Family Promise client Carla Wakefield and her son Phenix, put a human face on the issue.

Family Promise needs more partners in order for to move forward; more congregations willing to both count the cost and share the cost. We have done that as a congregation and I hope we will continue to do so.

Over the last several years, in another context, we have had an ongoing conversation here at Peace in which we've been "counting the cost" of doing ministry in dollars and cents; and next week we'll be "counting the cost" of replacing our old boiler system with a new one.

But none of these conversations have lasting merit unless they are grounded in a deeper conversation about how living like Jesus can be an exacting and difficult and troubling—even a life-threatening vocation.

Indeed, there are places around the world where being apprenticed to Jesus places one at great personal risk. From India to Nigeria, from Sumatra to Sudan, there are places where confessing Christ puts one's life in danger, where sharing a Christian witness can get you imprisoned or killed.

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[1] Margaret Hess, Lectionary Homiletics.
[2] To read the series, go to: http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/localnews/2012683006_homelessfamilies29m.html
[3] West Seattle Blog article/interview: http://westseattleblog.com/2010/08/west-seattle-based-family-promise-closes-doors-hopes-to-reopen.
[4] See report by King 5 TV at: http://www.king5.com/news/local/Family-Shelter-Needs-Funds-101235379.html

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"WHOEVER DOES NOT CARRY THE CROSS AND FOLLOW ME CANNOT BE MY DISCIPLE."

I don't know what your cross is…

- The cross you dragged in here with you this morning, or the cross you left at home because you it was too heavy or too embarrassing or too ugly to bring with you.
- I don't know what idols are vying for your allegiance in your life.
- I don't know who or what you must take up or lay aside in order to be faithful to Christ.

But you know. And Christ knows.[5]

The Christ we meet in today's gospel loves us too much to leave us where we are!
He is totally committed to our total transformation!

But he never said it was going to be easy! No, he says: COUNT THE COST.

YET…that's not his last word. For he also says: I WILL BE WITH YOU…EVEN TO THE END.

When Jesus called you in baptism to be about GOD'S WORK with YOUR HANDS, he made a promise: that he would go with you and supply you with what you needed to complete the task.

Discipleship isn't about mustering our own resources so we can muscle our way through the tough spots. Discipleship is about trusting that we can ASK, we can SEARCH, we can KNOCK, and God will provide what is needed for each situation and relationship and challenge; God will help us make the change, God will enable us to be Christ to our neighbors.

Sisters and brothers, God has a purpose for your life. And God has a purpose for our life together.

As we come together, as we meet at this Table and stay in conversation with each other, we rediscover what that purpose is. And God's Spirit gives us the will, the fortitude, and the ability to pursue it. Amen.

[5] William Willimon, Pulpit Resource.