

Fifteenth Sunday After Pentecost (C/RCL)

Luke 14.25-33

September 9, 2007

Holy Trinity, Manasquan

I have a beautiful collection of crosses. Some are meant to be worn as a necklace or earrings, and others are made to sit on the shelf or hang on the wall or on the Christmas tree. Because of today's Gospel I brought some to show you. This is my oldest cross. It's engraved with the date May 1917. It's got teeth marks on it, so although it's pretty big, a baby (maybe my mother) wore it at some point, long ago.... The one I'm wearing today, which I almost always wear in worship, is a miniature of the crosses our adult choir members have. Helga Yarnall's husband, Bill, carved it for me at the time of their daughter, Crystal's, wedding. This other one is a Waterford cross that my Aunt Flo gave me when I graduated from high school. She was there to see me receive my diploma, as she always was on important occasions.

I don't know which of these crosses is most costly, in terms of being worth the most money. Any difference in **price** doesn't matter to me, because they're all **precious** beyond words. They connect me to the dear ones who gave them to me. They connect me to Jesus, who suffered in love and rose in triumph for me.

There is an intro to today's lessons printed in italics on the top of the Celebrate insert. It says:

We are the people marked with Jesus' cross. But that cross is costly....

That's what Jesus is saying in this Gospel: we will pay a price if we follow Him. If we live as Christians, we will walk our own way of the cross.

When Jesus spoke the words,

“Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple,”

He was headed to Jerusalem and to His crucifixion. When St. Luke wrote those words down, Christians were being persecuted for their faith. Members of synagogues who said that Jesus

was Lord were evicted or worse. Gentiles who said that Jesus was Lord were being killed by the Romans. Belief in Jesus tore families apart. **Lives changed** because of belief in Jesus tore families apart. It wasn't so different than families in the thirteen colonies who split because some family members supported the King in England and others yearned for independence. It wasn't so different than families who split during the Civil War because some members supported the Confederacy and others supported the Union. Being a follower of Christ was **costly** in those early days of Christianity. And it still is.

What does Jesus **mean** when He says,

“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” ?

Well, the word's that translated “hate” doesn't carry the load of anger or hostility that our English word does. It's more like,

“Whoever comes to me and doesn't **turn away**, doesn't **detach** from father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.”

Jesus isn't talking about every day. He's talking about times when our loyalty is torn, when people or things are competing for our allegiance, vying for our heart. He's saying,

“If it's a choice between keeping peace in the family or following Me: follow Me.”

“If it's a choice between obeying the law or following Me: follow Me.”

“If it's a choice between staying physically safe or following Me: follow Me.”

“If it's a choice between keeping your life secure or following Me: follow Me.”

The people in history who have loved Jesus more than their own lives are those who are often called Saint with a capital “S.” One of those folks is “Saint” Maximilian Kolbe, a priest in a World War II concentration camp who offered his own life in place of a fellow prisoner with a family who was going to be shot because another prisoner had escaped. In the first lesson from

Deuteronomy the Lord says, “Choose life so that you and your descendants may live” (Dt. 30.19). Fr. Kolbe “chose life” by giving up his own so that another might live.

Many of us here are blessed to have families: parents or children or brothers or sisters. An example closer to home for **us** is those Gentiles who risked their families’ lives by hiding Jews in World War II. The penalty for doing so was death. Many said they **would** have risked their own lives but could **not** risk their families’ lives by harboring fugitives. Others said they could **not** stand by and do nothing. Some survived the war, along with those they hid, and others were killed because their compassion was discovered by the authorities. That was costly love indeed. The same type of love was shown by those in this country who allowed their homes to be stations on the Underground Railroad, enabling black slaves to make their way to Canada and freedom, 150 years ago. No price was too great for them to pay, if the love of Jesus required it.

Most of the invitations to discipleship in our lives are smaller and less scary than these. At some point we may be asked to put our life on the line, but it’s more likely we’ll be tempted to stray from Jesus’ path, to sell our soul, by cheating, lying, or stealing to win the game or get the A or assure the promotion. Jesus’ word to us is this: don’t do it. Follow in Jesus’ footsteps and be honest. Walk in the light, don’t slink around in the darkness.

We’re in daily danger of splitting faith and life, of worshiping God on the weekend and living the rest of the week as if our lives were our own. They are not. St. Paul said it best: “You have been bought with a price.” The price for us to be ransomed from sin was Jesus’ death on the cross. That is costly love. That is precious Good News.

As we follow in Jesus’ footsteps, people may make fun of us because of our love of God, but they’re more apt to mock us or hurt us because of our love of God’s children. Here’s another one of my favorite crosses, which some of you have seen before: the risen Christ on the cross, with no hands.... It reminds me of a great friend of Jesus, “Saint” Teresa of Avila, who wrote a prayer about what it means to carry the cross and follow Jesus:

Christ has no body now on earth but yours,
no hands, but yours,
no feet, but yours.

Yours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion
is to look out to the world.

Yours are the feet with which Christ is to go about doing good.

Yours are the hands with which Christ is to bless all people now.

Costly love given, in response to costly love received. Priceless. Difficult, but possible, by the
grace of God. Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham