

**Give up all Possessions | Psalm 139:1-6;13-18; Luke 14:25-33 | LUMC | 9-04-2022****By Rev Grace Kanake**

Dear church family and friends: What is up with Jesus, does anyone know? Last week He stepped on our toes, forcing us to review our seating arrangements at banquets, and to consider who we invite to our events and why we invite these types of people only! Jesus candidly pointed to the external issues that make it hard to maintain our faith. This week again, Jesus is still not resting, instead He is getting close to home. He is asking us to review our relationships with our siblings, spouses, parents and our children (either by birth or adoption!) and friends. The scary part is asking us to review how we relate with ourselves. How far can it get?

In a free society, people do not want their beliefs and stories being challenged, or their decisions on how they live their lives being scrutinized. And the worst feeling is when one's inner life seems to be mirrored on the wall. What is going on with Jesus, anyone know? I can imagine where Jesus is going with the story today: Jesus has been preaching for about three years now. He has raised the dead to life. He fed a crowd on the plains with miraculous food. He healed the sick with various illnesses. Jesus challenged those who lead double lives to change. He had faced the politicians and corrected the businesspeople who exorbitantly sold sacrificial food and animals in the temple. Jesus had fully done God's mission.

But, looking at the crowd that followed him every day, He was not satisfied with their faithful living. They paid more attention to their possessions than to loving Jesus and his mission. Some people waged war with each other, even with their family members. Jesus witnessed families torn apart with strife, members fighting over inheritance, members fighting for leadership positions. Some people in the crowd paid attention to their self-image; they practiced self-centered love. Some loved their spouse, parents, kids or siblings and friends more than they loved Jesus! In this reading, Jesus is giving us one more lasting dose of faith. He is asking his followers to make a lasting faithful decision, to "follow me genuinely and live faithfully or you are not my disciple!"

One may ask: Is it possible that the relationship with ourselves and with close family members can affect our faith?

Jesus calls His followers to give up all possessions to be genuine disciples. By asking me to consider how I relate with my soul, my family and relatives as possessions, Jesus is pushing me over the edge! I imagine my self-centered love and my love for other human beings are my possessions. The online dictionary defines, possessing something as is being in "the state of having, owning, or controlling." And it is true I can control loving myself and how to spread that love to embrace others. It is true I can

decide to love God more than myself, my family members and friends. I have the will-power to determine how to love and practice that love! I think you too can have control over these relationships and let Jesus be above all else. Jesus is love; He has demonstrated that love in everything He has done. Jesus desires us to do the same!

Examining the crowd that followed Jesus, we can perceive some of them were curious with inquisitive minds. They wanted to learn from Jesus. Some may have wanted healing, or maybe others were interested in being fed. There were also people watching to find mistakes Jesus would make, and then accuse him to his enemies. Therefore, Jesus who knows the “minds of humans”, turned to his followers and said: “Friends, I admire genuine followers but not those without real interest, or not having the desire to get to the heart of the matter.” Jesus was seeking—then and now—followers who are as wise as Him if they obey Him; if not, they would not be His followers.

Jesus is looking for believers who are passionate for ministry, followers with a singular devotion and willingness to die for Him, if that is what it calls for. Jesus made this disclaimer because, then and now, He is aware that some followers are wooed to the cross by its sheer beauty, a beauty that strikes one as easy living when watching genuine Christians from a distance. But Jesus is only interested in those with a heart for Him. I used to watch ladies of my mama’s age thrashing finger millets and then winnowing husks to get only the seeds. In this reading Jesus is winnowing the real followers from the half-baked and fake followers.

Jesus sets conditions for His followers to meet: first is to love Jesus genuinely above all else. In asking to be loved sincerely, Jesus is not asking us to hate our parents, siblings, spouse, kids or our friends. Jesus wants us to love Him so completely that all other love comes in second. When we love Jesus most, He will teach us how to love ourselves and express that love to ourselves and others.

Jesus wants us to avoid being misled from our faith by family ties. In fact, if anything, our families ought to make us love Jesus more. What can cause us to deviate from the path of obedience should be closely examined. We must put our family connections into a balancing scale on one side, and our love for Christ on the other side, and make sure the machine tilts toward the side with the love of Christ.

Jesus turns to address each Christian individually, asking how their self-love compares with their love for Him. When Jesus says, “Hate yourself for my sake”, He does not mean we ignore our personal needs like grooming, feeding or working and saving money or having the best shelter over our head. Jesus is asking that we first love Him and then ourselves and possessions.

Is there any question that Jesus would be pleased with a *Christ-centered* life rather than a self-centered one?

It gets awkward, humanly speaking. We are inclined to reserve the first love for ourselves, then transmit the love we do not need to others. It is the same way we treat God. We reserve love for ourselves and share with God the surplus of our love. We also do the same with all our possessions. Jesus is saying a “reversal love” is required where we start with Jesus, then ourselves, and then others. It’s hard to love God and then ourselves if we have not encountered *the risen Christ in our lives*. Those who have allowed the risen Christ to influence their lives can maintain that Christ-centered love. To keep this love in first place is easy if we always reflect on how our every action affects Christ and Christ’s mission.

Jesus wants us to reflect on what it means to live a genuine Christian life. He is asking us to fully evaluate what it means to be real Christian in the real world (including family settings). We can manage faithful Christian living by bearing our own cross, being sure never to deny Christ even if it costs in a human relationship. We must not be led away from the cross or forced to deny Christ to please a sibling, spouse, kids or friends. We are being called to the life of surrendering to Christ only, bearing reproach, shame, hatred, chastisement, suffering, challenges or even death for Christ’s sake. The Psalmist and Jeremiah’s liturgical readings remind us that God is the Potter, and we are a pot in the potter’s hands, and we should not exchange that role but fully submit to the crucified God.

The cross is heavy; it’s not too easy to carry. That is why Jesus says we must be prepared, counting the cost of being a Christian, bearing what Christ bore, being isolated and minimized for the sake of our faith. Jesus draws two examples to drive this point home. One is that a country going to war must be sure to win, or they need to reconsider. This example is alive in our memory. Seven months ago, the Russians commenced war with Ukraine hoping to “announce success in few days”. This war unfortunately is continuing after many months. The other example is a person planning to build a house: he/she must make sure there is enough money to pay for all the costs of that undertaking. Failure to meet the budget makes him/her the village laughingstock. These two examples remind us to plan our Christian life fully.

We must be sure to succeed in living faithfully. A story is told of three Christians who carried three wooden crosses and a cutter. After carrying their crosses for several miles, two people decided that their crosses were too heavy, and they would not reach their destination at a preset time. Each of the two cut a piece of the cross and threw it away.

Finally, they reached their goal, but there was a deep, narrow river to cross. The group leader said, "The reason you each carried a cross was to help you get across the river". He instructed each person to lay the cross in the river and then move on it to the other side. He started with one who did not cut his cross. He navigated the river and pulled away his cross. He told the other two to do the same, but their short crosses were swept away by the current of the river.

Only the group leader and one other person crossed the river. The other two were left behind. The carrying of the cross (living the "cross life") can be hard. One needs to be on guard for one's faith. Let us not allow our self-centered love, friends, and family members to water down our faith. Being a Christian is costly. We must count the cost and live faithfully until Christ's second coming in His glory to award us. Amen.