



SAINT ANDREW'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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Sermon for Sunday, September 8, 2019

The Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

FR. ALAN GIBSON

Deuteronomy 30:15-20 | Psalm 1 | Philemon 1-21 | Luke 14:25-33

In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Another fall season is upon us. Church School resumes today. Every committee, organization, club, ensemble and team that took the summer off will have meetings and events and rehearsals scheduled in the coming days. The cultural observance of summer is hardly over and we're already looking at our crazy, overbooked calendars, wondering how to fit in one more activity.

To say that we're busy, over-committed, or stressed, is a joke. Society prods us to go full tilt with all that we try to do, have to do, and want to do. We come to church, maybe looking for a little relief or peace in the midst of the compulsion we call living. Yet we hear Jesus demand one more commitment from us, "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."

That sounds crazy, and it is, but we're not so crazy as to try to squeeze that commitment into our list. If the insanity of trying to live up to that demand isn't clear to us, we need only read a little further where Jesus says, "none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions." Tempting as it may be to the Stewardship Committee, that will not be the slogan for the fall Annual Giving Campaign. Even so, with those requirements before us, we can pretty much strike Christian Discipleship from our 'to do' list, which will free-up loads of time for other things.

As you may know, there's a Sunday morning service at 9:15 in the chapel that draws a number children and their families. It's not Kiddie Church, but it is a high-energy service presented in a way in which little children can take part. They hear Jesus say the same things you hear every week. The challenge for Sally and me comes in finding how to relate what we all hear in a way that a five-year-old can understand, and that her parents will also appreciate. You can imagine the uproar that would come from the parents if they heard us tell their children that Kind Jesus wants them to grow up to hate their families, renounce all worldly goods, and follow

him alone. Yet, that's what it says. These words of Jesus stand with as much difficulty for us as they did for people 2,000 years ago.

It's hard to tell just when it began to happen, but the Christianity most of us inherited, and were raised in, has focused on efforts that work to turn us into good people, good citizens, people who support worthy causes, people who want to help. All of which is great and necessary to carry out the ministry of the Church. There's not a thing wrong with any of that, until you run up against Jesus wanting to turn us into a new creation, struggling to pull us through a spiritual rebirth as Children of God. He wants us to be more than just productive members of civil society. Being good takes effort; but becoming Godly means dying and being reborn as someone new. The language and symbols of baptism intentionally center around images of death and new life – our old selves being put to death in the water, with the promise that Christ will raise us to new life with him. That new life of grace frames all our commitments.

Even the cross, the chief symbol of our faith, has gone through its own cultural transformation. At its best it is now a symbol to urge us on to do better, work harder, endure the trials of this world. Those who heard Jesus say, "whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple," knew exactly what the cross meant: Certain death, nothing more. It would be like someone today asking us to take a rest on an executioner's gurney while a syringe is being filled. Which may be why we so readily accept the challenge of simply being Good. Being Godly, being a disciple, is demanding and costly, the level of commitment we must make is high – and for what?

The late Bishop Coburn of Massachusetts once said, "Discipleship is ... the setting of a direction to your life, the marking off of certain qualities, the expression of a certain spirit. It is not just following a set of rules ... but the following of a person ... it is the choices that we make that determine the kind of people we become." *

The first step of discipleship is to examine what, how, and whom we love. The best way to do that is to look at our

priorities. Start with the calendar. Whatever heads your list of commitments will affect everything and everyone else on that list, which is why Jesus asks that we put him first so that he can lead us in the direction of Godliness, love and life. To put anything else in that lead place, no matter how worthy it is, will lead us somewhere else. Even a child would understand that.

As we begin another season of being too busy with too many commitments, take a look at your own. Look not only at what they cost you, but look at what you get in return. If ultimately the cost is higher than what you get back, then you're not over committed, you're just crazy. It might be time to make a new start.

*from "A Life to Live, a Way to Pray," Seabury Press, 1973