

Luke 14:25-33

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German Lutheran theologian once wrote: *“When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”* Today’s Gospel reading is rather difficult to understand, and to accept. For it challenges us to look at, reevaluate, and truly contemplate our relationship with Christ. Jesus says to all of us today: *“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.”*

Jesus talks here about our relationship with him. He talks about what it truly means to be his disciple. And basically he says: With my calling and your answer to this calling, there has to be a radical change. Through the call of Christ the life we lived, with its ties, relationships, traditions, is no longer our life, we have become someone else, a new creation. All of the sudden we are forced to face the truth that the call of Christ does set up a barrier between us and our life.

This barrier is no hatred for life, no legalistic piety; it is the person of Jesus Christ who has come between man and his natural life. There can be no turning back, for Christ bars the way. By calling us he has cut us off from all closeness with the things of this world. For he wants to be the center of our lives. He stands between us and God, and for that very reason he stands between us and all other men and things. He is the Mediator, not only between God and man, but between man and man, between man and reality. Of course, there are plenty of gods of this world that try to be in charge of our lives, but that is the very reason why they are so opposed to Christ.

And that is the reason why Christ warns us as his disciples that there is not middle way when it comes to following him. Our life either belongs to Christ, or it belongs to us and this world. And so in the light of this ultimate call of Christ it is easier for us to understand that he doesn’t actually call us to hate our loved ones, but what he’s saying is that they cannot come between us and Christ, instead Christ as the center of our lives should be in between us and our relationships. Christ invites us as his disciples to start a new life that is defined by him, that is build on him only.

And sometimes we think that the life with Christ is like a carefree journey, but in reality the cross is a big part of it. Jesus says in today's Gospel: "Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." These words mean that the cross is laid on every Christian. And the first Christ-suffering which everyone must experience is the call to abandon the attachments of this world. It is that dying of the old self. As we follow Jesus, we completely surrender ourselves to Christ.

We remember this in baptism. It says: "When we were baptized in Christ Jesus, we were baptized into his death. We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead, we too might live a new life." And so in the light of this promise, the cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ. Let me repeat that: **"The cross is the beginning of our communion with Christ."** For when Christ calls a person, he bids them come and die. And it is the same death every time - death in Jesus Christ, the death of the old self at his call.

And so Jesus emphasizes this ultimate surrender to his calling by using the two examples of a builder and a king going to war. "For which of you, building a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it?" What do we build our lives on? What is our foundation? Is it Christ and Christ alone? Or is it little bit of Christ, little bit of this world, our own efforts, and the other gods that we serve daily? Jesus is saying that we need to look into the future, for what will happen at the end will truly matter. And so if we read these words in the light of eternity, Jesus is basically saying at the end everything will stand or fall on him or on our relationship with him. Where Christ is the foundation there is going to be a successful ending. And that's why Jesus concludes: you cannot become my disciples if you do not give up all your possessions.

And so how to conclude this ultimate call of Christ? Dietrich Bonhoeffer explains it through the picture of a wagon wheel. It has circular frame with spokes that connect in the center...

The only true life is the life that is lived through and with Christ. Christ must stand between us and our relationships. And the same Mediator who makes us new individually is also the founder of a new fellowship. He stands in the center, but he also unites us all. My prayer is that we will recommit ourselves to Christ this week; that we will let him be the center of our lives; that through him we will become a new creation. My prayer is that through him and his love, we'll approach one another. Amen