

Sermon Proper 18 2019

September 8, 2019

Luke 14:25-35

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson which was previously read.

A couple of weeks ago, I was reading some news headlines and I found one about an actor by the name of Cameron Arnett. Now chances are that you probably haven't heard of him. I hadn't. But Cameron apparently had quite the burgeoning acting career in the eighties. He was on the show "Meet The Browns." He was on "Star Trek: The Next Generation," and things were really going his way. Then, the way he told it in the article, he was up for a very lucrative part; one that seemed as though it could be the springboard into a very real stardom. As he was ready to sign the dotted line, though, the agency told him there would be the requirement that he be willing to do some scenes with partial nudity in them. Now, I don't know to what extent that meant he would be unclothed, but he said it was then that he felt as though God was saying, "Time to get out."

You see what Cameron had was the opportunity to gain pleasures in the world, but he saw one for picking up his cross and following Jesus. And as our Lord Jesus says it this morning we see what a load that is. **"Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?"**

Of course, our Lord goes on to describe what that counting looks like. If you don't, then you might only build the foundation and people will laugh at you. Or like how a king counts his soldiers, and when he only has 10,000 to go against 20,000, he sends out the delegation to make peace.

Yes, there is a cost involved in this cross. If you don't think so consider what our Sunday School kids will be hearing about for one of their missionary projects this year. They'll be hearing of Mohamed Gurhan, a man who was born in Somalia as a Muslim. Mohamed was converted to Christianity and because of that fled to nearby Kenya. As I'm sure most of you know, Somalia is a hard place to be as a Christian. Because of

the strict enforcement of a very literal understanding of the Sharia Law found in the Koran, Christians there have to fear for their lives. Mohamed is no exception.

But see, you have to understand how ingrained the whole culture is in Islam. You have to understand what this would mean for Mohamed. He had to leave his father and mother. He had to leave his friends. He had leave all that because if he didn't there was the threat of death. He had to hate his own life in order to convert, and in that then, there is now the threat of death.

Of course, that's the issue here. The cost of discipleship at the feet of our Lord Jesus is that cross, the death of ourselves. And this is something I don't think we fully appreciate sometimes because of our time and place. We don't have to sacrifice to survive, and so we assume we won't have to sacrifice to be faithful in our life as Christians.

But the cross is a loss of life. Pick up your cross and lose your life. Pick up the cross where you crucify your sin. Pick up the cross where you sacrifice and die to all of the things of this life. It's a hard call. But that's the call. And it's still relevant.

It's particularly relevant in our culture where we focus on me. Who *I* am, what is *my* identity. What am *I* entitled to? But are you willing to suffer the loss of yourself as a disciple of our Lord? Are you willing to suffer the loss of your identity to be identified in the body of our Lord, His Church? Are you willing to suffer the loss of husband, wife, children, parents, siblings? Ask this seriously, because often we're not willing to sacrifice trivial things, let alone the things that we think are important. How many of you would sacrifice your home? Or your job, your income? Parents with children, what about their education? Or what about when our children leave the faith, are we still willing to stand with what our Lord says about the faith, that Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, not compromising on salvation by grace through Him alone? And as I say that, I say that in the knowledge that even should our children fall away we always trust that they may be brought back, and that our perfect Heavenly Father has loved them even more than we do.

But this is the cross and it is heavy. It is a loss of life. And again this is what we are called to, so either we lose that life now, or we lose it eternally. Or as our Lord describes it, we become unfit for the dirt or even the manure pile. So how do we bear this? How do we find the strength to die, to pick up that cross? Only in view of who our Lord is.

I was listening to a podcast the other day that was talking about how God seems so illogical in the midst of what we see in the world. And what one of the speakers said was so interesting. He called God the topsy-turvy God. He said that when we look at God we see that He turns things over in a way that is so topsy-turvy in comparison to what we think they should be. In a sense, with regard to what we're saying, we think of these things that we want to cling to as so valuable, but Jesus wants us to see how they are nothing compared to Him. He wants us to see that He is our life, He is our strength, He is our sustenance. And when we cling to these things they become idols, they become impediments. These are things that truly are beneficial in so many ways, but look at how we cling to them, and they still can be idols. Of course, even worse we cling to things that aren't even beneficial in some ways, we even cling to our sin.

I was reading about a commentator on Luther who was saying that Luther got this. He was saying how we shouldn't look at all of these things, count the cost of them and say, "Yup, there they all are, now I'll still hold on to them because Jesus died for my sin." No, he said, that's justification of sin. Instead, he made the point that when Luther speaks of something like saying, "Sin boldly, let your sin be strong, but your faith in Christ be stronger," he's not telling people to go sin because they can "get away with it." Again, that's justifying your sin. That's still the impurity that taints the salt. He's saying, don't justify that sin, crucify it. Die to it. Be justified as the sinner. Be the one united to Christ and His cross where that sin was hanged and died.

And think about how Luther speaks of this baptismally. I've mentioned this before, but what does Luther say about baptism? *What does such baptizing with water indicate? It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die, with all sin and evil desires.* In other words quit enjoying your sin and turn from it. Quit clinging to your life here. Quit clinging to your comforts here. Quit clinging to the joy you get out of making yourself better than others, whether it's because you think you're smarter, or more moral, or because they have harmed you and you don't want to forgive them. Leave all of that. Why? *That a new man may daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.*

Now as Lutherans here and now we baptize by sprinkling, but even up to the time of Luther they dunked. From what I understand now, we don't immerse because

some say that it has to be immersion to be a real baptism. But immersion shows this doesn't it? Drowning under the water. Dying, begin buried in Christ. All of the things you would hold onto here, leave them in those waters. Leave them there with your sin, and now live in the new life of Christ's resurrection. Live in that life of obedience and faithfulness Christ. **“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil.”**

Live in this life of this topsy-turvy God. The God who topples all of the things we hold in esteem and who flips them in Christ. Live in the topsy-turvy life of Christ.

To come back to what I said about this only being done in view of our God, this topsy-turvy God, that's where we must look in the midst of this. We have to look upon the One who shows us the full nature of this flipping things on their head. Think about it. We have all these things we shouldn't cling to, but do, but Jesus did the opposite. All the things Jesus shouldn't be, He became. He became sin that you might become righteousness. He became forsaken by God that God would never leave you nor forsake you. He became lowly and despised that you would be given His glory—not the earthly power and attention hungry glory; no, the glory before the Heavenly Father whose opinion is the only one that matters. The Word coming from His mouth which not only forgives your sin, but justifies you, makes you right before Him.

And most of all Jesus didn't see even the equality with God something to be grasped, something to be clung to, and so He carried our cross to Calvary. He bore death itself. We see in Him the One who bears the real load of what He calls us to. He came with 20,000 troops and yet sends us the peace offering with our 10,000. He truly is the only One who grasped the depth of this call, who grasped its burden, who grasps its gravity. And He willing has carried it for you.

Heed His call, then. Know that the call to pick up the cross is unbearable, and you will fall short. But know that He picks it up for you, for your life, your life in Him. Amen.