

A Case for Stewardship

Twenty-third Sunday of Ordinary Time – September 4, 2016 – Luke: 14:25-33

The gospel for this week is anything but reassuring. In fact, it is quite challenging. Jesus specifically says that to be one of his disciples one must hate their father and mother. Seriously? How can this be a teaching of Jesus Christ? The notion to reject one's most intimate human relationships seems strangely out of place in Sacred Scripture. And yet, there it is. In fact, the entire gospel this week calls for the rejection of all personal relationships and possessions. However, what this gospel is doing is making a case for stewardship, a realigning of our lives with God.

Stewardship is at the heart of Christian life. Jesus is not saying that we are to reject those we love, but rather, we are to love God first and foremost. It is a prioritizing of our lives in relationship to God. To be a disciple of Christ, we must place Christ at the forefront of our personal life, with all other things aligned after Him.

This was a difficult thing for me to grasp as a young wife and mother. I could not imagine loving anyone or anything more than my family. It was at a Marriage Encounter that Bill and I attended 32 years ago that my "AHA" moment happened. The realization was subtle and yet quite brutal.

For the first time in my life, it hit me that I was not the center of the universe, nor was my husband or children. The center of all Christian life is Christ. In listening to the witness talks by the team on the encounter, I came face to face with the truth that I had, for all my life, put myself and my wants first. I called myself, Catholic, Christian, a good person. I just never had a clue that God...Father... Son... and Holy Spirit were the source of my existence. I'd put them all in a nice little compartment that I classified as belonging to me. I had the Trinity in a box. What I realized that day was that I belong to God. And I am accountable.

It put things into perspective. My life, my family, house, car, furniture, bank account, my intelligence, my job belong first and foremost to God. It is all on loan. Nothing about this earthly life is permanent. None of it is mine. I am the steward of my life with great responsibility for the blessings bestowed on me. And yet, this is a costly way to live. I have to work hard for things that really aren't mine.

Jesus says that to be a disciple we must weigh the cost of following him. In other words, to be a Christian is not some random act of happenstance. It must be a deliberate choice. **"Which of you wishing to construct a tower does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if there is enough for its completion? Otherwise, after laying the foundation and finding himself unable to finish the work the onlookers should laugh at him and say, 'This one began to build but did not have the resources to finish.'"**

So on that day in 1984, I had an awakening that was as radical as this week's gospel. It was a "Come to Jesus" kind of moment in which, for the first time in my life, I understood that my life was not my own and therefore nothing that I had accumulated was either.

Instead of this being a depressing revelation, it was really quite liberating. It has allowed me to trust God more, seek God more and live a bit more detached from the world. This doesn't mean I'm perfect at it. I still like my stuff. I still have possessions. And, from time to time, I still forget that I'm not the center of the universe. But this truth has carved out of my heart a hardness that had grown over time and replaced it with gratitude for all things.

The love of God is like no other. My fear is that many people never recognize it or accept it. If one makes the choice to follow Christ, it is a challenging journey. Jesus says today, **"Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple."** Harsh words? Maybe. But from my perspective today...This is the call to love greatly and share generously.

Blessings!

Sue Schettler