

“Unfinished Business”
Pentecost 13 – September 8, 2019 – Luke 14:25-33

Have you ever been stuck “between a rock and a hard place?” You know, those times when you are deciding between a great opportunity and great responsibility? Today, we take a look at just such moments that are sort of the “unfinished business” of our lives. We Christians live in the already/not yet of the Kingdom of God. Luther said of this experience that it was an example of our status of being at once, both *saint and sinner*. Always in tension, never resolved. Life in the grey. On the one hand – we are nice, good people, with really Good Intentions. On the other hand, we know that God offers something even better - New Life - but Change is hard, and though we might try our very best, we are unable to free ourselves. We get comfortable in our definition, our personal expression of Christianity. We get stuck in Old Life.

But, God understands Sin (literally, missing the mark of our good intentions) so God encourages our Repentance, (literally, to *turn around; to go the other way.*) To change. On the first night of Confirmation this week I was teaching about Holy Baptism. The conversation was centered on the difference between infant baptism (which Lutherans practice) and believers’ baptism. One youngster asked me afterwards, “Is that why we baptize ***babies*** - before they get set in their ways - like ***old people***?” (Hmmm.)

Following Jesus is not for faint-hearted. It’s hard work. Before anything else, it takes courage to be different, to commit to something that will cost you control, and resources that you could certainly keep for yourself. So, why do we keep doing what we have always done, and find it so hard to change even for the better? Well, why do we marry or have children? Why do we live out our vocation, why do we follow our dreams? For these experiences, we gladly *change* our lives and *do* the hard work. Somehow, we find our way past the fear of consequences. Because at that moment, this change just FEELS right.

In today’s story from Luke, the crowd was not puzzled; and were probably not considering any life changes at that moment. *Thou shalt have no other Gods before me* had been abundantly clear to generations of Jews, with no updates or rewrites. But Jesus was calling for dangerous changes, challenging the status quo, urging them to action. He, himself, has just left a dinner given by a leader of the Pharisees, where he has broken the rules again, healing on Sabbath. He has chastised their arrogance and told them where to sit. He has even told them who to invite to their own dinner parties. So, try not to be too surprised when today’s words from Jesus cut, sting and surprise us – for they are difficult to swallow, and even more difficult to follow.

Imagine how the crowd heard Jesus’ reminder of the First Commandment? For Jews, family ***was*** their connection to God (and vice versa.) But Jesus is saying that if your family, your tribe, your own life distract you or come before God, “you cannot be my disciples.” If that’s not enough to get our attention, he adds, “whoever does not carry the cross and follow me...cannot be my disciple.” How is this Christian? How does this come from Jesus? You know, following Jesus is not for the fainthearted – especially when he reveals his passion for God’s claim on the world, he does not mince words and he is serious about

wanting us to turn away, detach from, have nothing to do with anything that gets in the way of his mission to *finish the business with* the world God so loves.

How will God bring this change about? Through us! And here's how: Beyond his call for us to detach from familiar bonds and security, is the key to Jesus' mission, revealed through two short examples:

A Good Builder does not start without a plan and a cost-estimate **to see if** the project is feasible *before* the construction begins. In the same way, a Good King does not consider battle without assessing the enemies' strength, **to see if** the point of the conflict is worth its cost. If there are insufficient resources, a Good Builder and a Good Leader will change their plans. But if the resources are there, all the creative options are open.

Can you hear Jesus say that God has ok'd the Creation Project?

Can you hear Jesus ask us to be part of finishing the business?

Can you accept a chance to change the world; to do God's Work. Our Hands?

The Vision is Expensive and Exciting! And, how perfect is it that the symbol of our faith is sealed on us at baptism and traced in ash each year on the exact same spot. We are carrying the cross of Christ. We wear it on our bodies. Through it, we've been claimed by God. We've been claimed FOR God.

If following Jesus is (for you), "doing the right thing," **good!** You're doing that! You can feel good about a good start on the business at hand. But IF there is something missing in your life - something tapping at the back of your brain - something you can't even put into words - itching where you can't reach to scratch - then let's talk about Jesus:

Who accepts you exactly as you are—without you having to change, shift, edit or become something different;

Who is the source of the excitement of hooking into and participating, no, **contributing** to changing the world;

Who never lies to you about how hard it will be, and calls you over and over again, "Are you SURE you want to follow me?" In today's bulletin the devotional paragraph on the back says, "The **Follow me** is a gift...The **Follow me** promises we are never alone." The **Follow me** means finishing God's unfinished business of love for all, no matter what. That's the Gospel message... and it should take your breath away! Because living that Gospel message, you are changing, and you will change the world as well. Amen.

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