

Possessions

Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Luke 14:25-30; 33

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“None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.” – Luke 14:33

Now, let’s be honest here. If I’m thinking it, there’s a pretty good chance you are too. That on the surface, at first reading, these texts are nothing short of brutal.

I mean we’ve got this mic-drop line about giving up our possessions, and Jesus is just like *yup, that’s it, take it or leave it*. And not just some of our possessions, he says, or our favorite ones, but ALL of them. And, even hashier still, is that verse that comes before this one, you know, the one about HATING our father and mother, brother and sister, and even life itself if we’re going to follow Him.

Like seriously guys, what on Earth is going on here in these verses from the Book of Good News today?

And not making matters any easier, we also have old Deuteronomy telling us that we must obey the commandments of God, or else... be good and you’ll be blessed, be bad and you’ll “PERISH.” I don’t even think our most stressed-out young parents would say that sort of reward-punishment system would be a good idea. It’s all so transactional, right? Not like, be good simply because it’s right, or that it makes life better for you and for me. No. Just obey, and you’ll get good things, don’t obey and you’ll die. Sheesh.

These are probably then not the texts we should lead with when trying to increase our attendance here, or bring new folk into the fold. No. Probably not.

Moreover, they seem so at odds with our personal stories and journeys of faith and the reasons why we are here, right? For I imagine very few of us are here today because we have felt threatened or scared, or have been coerced by fear. I mean, that’s Pascal’s Wager stuff right there. Rather, I imagine most of us are here because this faith, on its own merit, makes our life brighter, and more colorful, more hopeful, and meaningful, right? You know, reasons that are inherently more positive and persuasive in origin, than say, OBEY OR ELSE.

But my friends, these are in the end our texts for the day. We can’t just dismiss them outright. No, I didn’t pick them and you didn’t want them, but surely the lectionary must have something in mind, intended for us to parse out and take away as instructional and helpful. One would think.

So let’s try by starting again, shall we? *“None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.”* – Luke 14:33

Hmm... Nope. Still hard. Still brutal.

And I think it's so hard because it challenges the very notion of what is so often the source of our everyday worship: that is, our substitute God. I mean, truthfully, who do we really worship when we aren't here? Jesus? Or, perhaps ourselves, our lives, our accumulations?

What possesses us, my friends? The Spirit of God, or the spirit of something else?

I know. This **is** hard, and what none of us wanted to hear today on this holiday weekend, because really, none of us here are ready and able to face this sort of radical cost of discipleship, are we? If faced with the choice, with the proverbial weapon to our head, would we be able to walk away from it all? Would we be able to say right now, "Yes, Jesus, we're done with our old lives as we've come to build and enjoy them, we're ready to leave it all and follow you" -- would we? Could we?

Now I imagine some of you are thinking: *why* is this being asked of us at all? I mean we've only used the gifts and talents God has given us, and have worked hard for all this, haven't we? I mean, I went to school for this robe. Anya took on great debt for her degree. And we struggled to pay it all off to bear the fruits of all this. As have you. As have all of you... And now, Jesus just expects that we're supposed to give it all up? To leave it behind and even hate it?

Please. Please God, this is too hard.

But perhaps, perhaps we're hearing the word *possessions* wrongly. Perhaps we are so wrapped up in our things, our stuff, that when we hear that word, *possessions*, we immediately think of the stuff we own, rather than the stuff that owns us... that possesses us, that we'd be better off without.

Perhaps then what Jesus is really getting at here is this sort of stuff that takes hold of us; that resides not around us in material things, but in us, as the forces that shape our hearts and control our minds. Perhaps, for you, this possession is called lust. Or perhaps, for you, it is called envy. Or perhaps, it is known as jealousy. Or perhaps it's something more like anger, or shame, or vanity.

What has possessed us, my friends? That has gotten in the way of our paths as individuals, and as a community, from freely answering the call of Christ? From this discipleship that seeks to push us forward against the forces of everything else that wants to hold us back.

"None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions." – Luke 14:33

Possessions. Oh Lord, how we want to give up *these* possessions!

The shame, the anger the vanity...

We want to let go and be your people. To be your disciples. But the sad truth is, that's all easier said than done, isn't it?

For in this world today, especially in this nation and this our culture, it's so hard to let go of it all... of ourselves and our senses of achievement and beliefs of self-importance. To forfeit what we think we have earned, for the benefit of someone else or something greater. No, we are too proud, and so increasingly individualistic, that we don't see our possessions as impediments; rather we celebrate them and cast them as the stars in our own shows. We are after all, especially on the interwebs, the gods of our own little planets, aren't we? Or so we pretend. And so we just swipe and build away, until one day, we will be too tired and wrinkled, and all covered in dust to care anymore.

Sadly my friends, like that illustration, we have made our lives into "a monotheistic landscape, founded not in belief in the One Creator, but in the sole beholder of ourselves; and so we shrink and will feel in the midst of the drought of the fields the dryness of our souls." – (paraphrase of a quote from Miguel de Unamuno).

In one of his most influential essays ("En torno al casticismo"), Miguel de Unamuno remembers the errors and faults that lead to the downfall of Imperialistic Spain; its greed and abuse of power, its dogmatism and unchecked nationalism. In an academic, but illustrative set of pages, Unamuno suggests that the demise of Spain's presence and influence around the world was accelerated, ironically, by being possessed with its traditions of "heroism." Sound familiar?

If Spain were to rise to one day be great again, he writes, it would not rest on resurrecting these old fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters -- these old archetypes and familiar ways of thinking -- but rather in charting a new course forward, leaving all the well-recited but ill-informed traditions behind.

Just as Christ then tells us that there is something better than this, than living for ourselves and by all that we own, and all that owns us, Unamuno tells us that there can be something greater than what came before, if we are only brave enough to let it go.

So, let go, my friends, and "choose life" (Deuteronomy 30:19). Choose life over the drying of your soul. For today we are called to be disciples, to abandon the possessions and the traditions, the powers and the influences, that are ever holding us back from living rightly and moving forward.

So come forward. Come and join each other here at the table where all are welcomed and set free, by Him who sacrificed it all and in descending left Heaven behind, all for the sake of you and even me.

Thanks be to Christ.

Amen.