

Ready to Labor

September 4, 2016

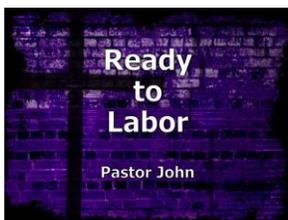
Luke 14: 25-33 – “Being a Disciple”

25 Large crowds were walking along with Jesus, when he turned and said:

26 You cannot be my disciple, unless you love me more than you love your father and mother, your wife and children, and your brothers and sisters. You cannot come with me unless you love me more than you love your own life. 27 You cannot be my disciple unless you carry your own cross and come with me.

28 Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. What is the first thing you will do? Won't you sit down and figure out how much it will cost and if you have enough money to pay for it? 29 Otherwise, you will start building the tower, but not be able to finish. Then everyone who sees what is happening will laugh at you. 30 They will say, “You started building, but could not finish the job.”

31 What will a king do if he has only ten thousand soldiers to defend himself against a king who is about to attack him with twenty thousand soldiers? Before he goes out to battle, won't he first sit down and decide if he can win? 32 If he thinks he won't be able to defend himself, he will send messengers and ask for peace while the other king is still a long way off. 33 So then, you cannot be my disciple unless you give away everything you own.



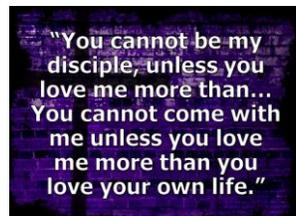
Labor Day is tomorrow. In town there has been an antique car show, a dodgeball tournament, and ... Later today will be the demolition derby and tomorrow a parade and barbeque and lots of fun. It is a weekend full of celebrations. Labor Day

began not as a celebration but as a protest. In September of 1882, 10,000 workers took unpaid time off to march in protest. Common to the day were 12 hour days, 7-day work weeks, child labor as young as five and six years old, and

extremely unsafe working conditions in many factories. The idea of a “workingmen’s holiday” caught on in many industrial centers as many states began to celebrated workers on the first Monday in September. However, it did not become a national holiday until a tragedy forced the federal government to make Labor Day a legal holiday in the US. In a strike and the ensuing boycott involving the Pullman Car Company, federal troops were finally called into Chicago to break the strike that had crippled national railroad traffic. Dozens of workers were killed in the violence that followed in May of 1894. As a means to repair ties with workers all across the nation who felt that the government had sided with big business, Congress created the Labor Day holiday in 1896. According to the US Department of Labor, the holiday “is a creation of the labor movement and is dedicated to the social and economic achievements of American workers”. America has very much been founded on its work ethic – from factory workers to farmers and ranchers to hosts of others who have contributed to making our nation a great country. The American worker is truly the backbone of our great nation. For the labor of all, we give our thanks this day. Let us pray...

It strikes me as odd that today’s passage so contrasts with the American way of life. The American way is rugged individualism, the idea that anyone can succeed if they work hard enough, and the sense that one must constantly be climbing the ladder of success. The secular world views wealth, possessions, power, appearance, and status as what matters in life. But God’s economy is built on different values. Today, in verse 26, again hear Jesus’ words:

“²⁶ You cannot be my disciple, unless you love me more than... You cannot come with me unless you love me more than you love your own life.” Talk about un-American!! I



say that jokingly, but we must take very seriously the tension that exists between

the ways of the world and the ways of God. It is indeed very challenging to live as a Christian in this culture.

Today's passage in Luke is titled, "Being a Disciple". In the verse I just read, we see that Jesus is calling us to place Him first in our lives. We first must love Jesus more than anything else in our lives. This is the first step to being Jesus' disciple. In order to place Jesus first, what must we do? We must place all else second or third or fourth or ... somewhere on down the line. This means that things like family and work must be second or third at best. This is a hard choice to make. We love our families dearly and would do about anything for them.

Place them second or third in our priorities? Hard indeed. For some, hunting or sports or boating or socializing may come ahead of family or even work. Even for these folks, to be a disciple, Jesus must be number one. But, for me and perhaps for many of you, the kicker comes in the last line of this verse: "*more than you love your own life.*" Even more than self? Friends, Jesus is asking a lot. It is hard. It is an everyday challenge. But it is worth it.

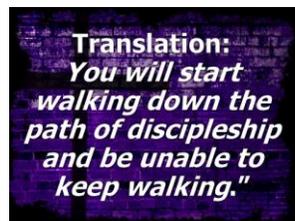


Jesus' first illustration about being a disciple speaks of preparing well. He begins by telling of a man who wanted to build a tower. Jesus says, in essence, first things first: "*Won't you sit down and figure out how much it will cost and if you have enough money to pay for it?*" Before we begin to walk as Jesus' disciple, we too have to sit down and figure out what it will cost. We must consider and ask ourselves what are the 'costs' of putting Jesus first? We can profess that Jesus is our priority only after considering the potential costs and determining if we have enough within us to 'pay' these prices. Maybe the promotion will wait another



year. Maybe we will just catch the second half of the big game. Maybe we will donate a few hours counseling someone who is struggling with their budget and finances. Maybe we will have to let that friendship go by the wayside. Maybe we will have to carve out time each morning to get to know Jesus a little better.

Jesus cautions us about what can happen if we jump in unprepared and not ready to offer up what it takes. From verse 29, *“You will start building the tower, but not be able to finish. Then everyone who sees what is happening will laugh at you.”* Translation: you will start down the path of discipleship and be unable to keep walking. You will allow your priorities to be rearranged. Your job or event or activity will be more important than your faith. Sleep will trump that hour you were giving to God. Your friends will come calling and you will be unable to resist. We must know that the path is narrow and the way is hard before we commit to stepping onto the path of discipleship.



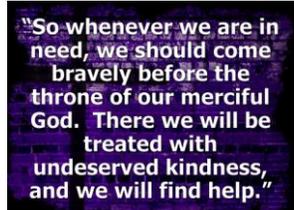
Translation:
*You will start
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Jesus continues and in the next illustration He talks about a battle not yet fought. In this illustration a king comes to realize that he cannot defeat the enemy coming against him. Instead of being unable to defend himself and to fight a losing battle, he chooses to ask for terms of peace. In this life, we face many battles we cannot win alone. There are many things that Satan throws against us that we cannot stand against on our own. But we do not stand alone. We do not labor in vain. We are not alone.

First, in Hebrews 4, we are reminded that Jesus is still on our side. Reading from verses fourteen through sixteen:

“¹⁴ We have a great high priest, who has gone into heaven, and he is Jesus the Son of God. That is why we must hold on to what we have said about him. ¹⁵ Jesus understands every weakness of ours, because he was tempted in every way that we are. But he did not sin! ¹⁶ So whenever we are in need, we should come bravely before the throne of our merciful God. There we will be treated with undeserved kindness, and we will find help.”

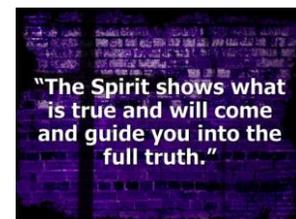


“So whenever we are in need, we should come bravely before the throne of our merciful God. There we will be treated with undeserved kindness, and we will find help.”

Hear these promises. Jesus stands for us in heaven. He understands our weakness. He has felt out temptations. So whenever we are tempted, whenever we are in need of help, we are to come bravely to Jesus. At the throne we do not find condemnation or punishment. At the throne we are promised mercy and undeserved kindness and help in our battle with sin and temptation.

Second, in John 16, we are reminded that the Holy Spirit is also on our side. Once we accept Jesus as Lord and Savior, we receive the Spirit. From that point on, the Spirit dwells in each of us. Reading verses thirteen and fourteen:

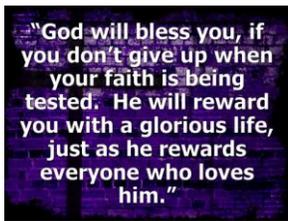
“¹³ The Spirit shows what is true and will come and guide you into the full truth. The Spirit doesn’t speak on his own. He will tell you only what he has heard from me, and he will let you know what is going to happen. ¹⁴ The Spirit will bring glory to me by taking my message and telling it to you.”



“The Spirit shows what is true and will come and guide you into the full truth.”

The Holy Spirit couples with Jesus to be a constant presence in our lives. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can walk as disciples of Christ. A task that we cannot accomplish on our own becomes possible with the guidance, direction, power, correction, teaching, and leading of the Spirit.

In many places in the Bible, we are reminded that temptation and trial are to be expected. James also reminds us that temptation does not come from God but instead from within us. Reading from James 1, verses twelve through fifteen:



¹² God will bless you, if you don't give up when your faith is being tested. He will reward you with a glorious life, just as he rewards everyone who loves him. ¹³ Don't blame God when you are tempted! God cannot be tempted by evil, and he doesn't use evil to tempt others. ¹⁴ We are tempted by our own desires that drag us off and trap us. ¹⁵ Our desires make us sin, and when sin is finished with us, it leaves us dead.

Do not give up when we are being tested. Trust in God. The cost of sin is death. But the reward of holding true to our faith is a glorious life. When we are tempted, we need to look within. It is there we find both the root of our sin and also the presence of the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us away from sin and to strengthen and encourage us to stand firm in our faith. We are also promised that God will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we can bear and that God will be present to help us in our time of need.

Reading 1 Corinthians 10, verses twelve and thirteen, we are reminded of this:

"You are tempted in the same way that everyone is tempted. But God can be trusted to let you not be tempted too much, and he will show you how to escape from your temptations."

¹² Even if you think you can stand up to temptation, be careful not to fall. ¹³ You are tempted in the same way that everyone else is tempted. But God can be trusted not to let you be tempted too much, and he will show you how to escape from your temptations.

For me it does help to know that I am not alone, that we all face the same kind of trials. When I come to a brother or sister in Christ and share something that I am struggling with, then I know they will pray for me, check in on me to hold me accountable, and will support and encourage me. Knowing that a fellow disciple might call or text or stop in and say, "John, how is your walk today? How is that struggle going?" helps me in my walk. It fortifies and strengthens me.

And lastly, the reward for being faithful, for walking as Jesus walked. We read about our reward just a bit ago in James 1. In Romans 2, verses six and seven, we read more specifically of the prize:

"God will reward each of us for what we have done. He will give eternal life to everyone who has patiently done what is good in the hope of receiving glory, honor, and life that lasts forever."

⁶ God will reward each of us for what we have done. ⁷ He will give eternal life to everyone who has patiently done what is good in the hope of receiving glory, honor, and life that lasts forever.

The reward for keeping the faith, for fighting the good fight, for loving as Jesus loved is eternal life. The goal in this life is eternal life in heaven. To keep the faith and to resist temptation is hard but not impossible. To fight the good fight and not to sink down into the muck is difficult but not impossible. To love as Jesus loved is so hard at times but is not impossible. We can do all things through Jesus Christ.



As we ponder the question, “Are we ready to labor for Christ?”, recall Paul’s words: “*He will give eternal life to everyone who has patiently done what is good*”. To be a disciple of Christ is a long term commitment. It takes consistent effort day after day after day. It requires us to be rooted daily in Christ. It will be challenging to walk as a disciple, but we know we do not walk alone. We go forth with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit empowering us, strengthening us, correcting us, encouraging us, praying for us, and teaching us as we go. Winner Methodist Church, are we ready to labor for Christ? Let us pray.