

Sunday, October 13, 2019 – An Eye Toward the Future II
“Rooted and Established in Love”

Luke 14: 25-35; Ephesians 3: 10-21

Rev. Derek S. Klemm, Mountain View Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV
Structure

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Such hard words. “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters – yes, even his own life – he cannot be my disciple!”

Overwhelming words. Perhaps it is even stressful to hear them. Lutherans, for the most part, do a good job talking about God’s grace – the fact that we’re saved from sin, death and hell completely by God’s free gift, totally apart from anything we deserve or have earned. It’s all God. Nothing, I repeat, nothing, can overwhelm that truth and it is the only way to be saved.

But Jesus’ intent, I think with our hard words today is to overwhelm us not with fear, rather, Jesus overwhelms us what our call to be a disciple is about. He claims to be our God, our Lord. Jesus is making a claim on our very existence. Being a disciple who is faithful to Jesus means to let go of ourselves – Jesus must be our top priority. For disciples, purchased and claimed by His blood that means that discipleship is hard, but there’s also great joy.

Being a disciple is the theme related to our next congregational target. Based on your feedback at creative workshops in April and August our congregational leadership has been developing a proposed Ministry Plan to guide our lives into the future. After the April input we developed a new vision statement: “We are God’s chosen people, adopted in baptism, forgiven through His Gifts and sent on His mission to love and disciple others. Last week we learned the first two targets – an aspirational, challenging statement that our worship connects all people to God’s Gifts, and the second that our campus is welcoming and secure, a sanctuary. This week we hit the third of the targets, “We are disciples making disciples.” With God’s help we would have that *our entire MV LCS community would be actively focused on their lives as disciples of Jesus, who in turn are all engaged in making more disciples of Jesus – among our church members, school families, friends, neighbors and all of Las Vegas.*

Exciting? Hold up, because reading our Gospel today you’ll probably have second thoughts on whether you want to be a disciple, much less be on God’s mission to disciple others. You read this description and you wonder, “Why would I take on that misery, much less spread it!” If Jesus is trying to “sell” discipleship it’s not the most persuasive argument.

Thankfully we have a God who would rather tell us the truth than bait and switch us with a great sounding idea that's way harder than it looks.

Being a disciple means to "hate" everything that comes before Jesus. Jesus does not command us to despise and cruelly treat our families. Yet His words are still overwhelming. If you've ever been put in a position where someone you love and care about wants something of you that puts you in conflict with God's Word, or that damages your life in Jesus and you've chosen to be faithful to your Lord, then you know just how overwhelming Jesus' command is. It's a call to put even your peace and serenity in your closest relationships, your own priorities, your own preferences in the backseat. What a claim! And still, some of us have it harder than others. I know there are people here this morning married to an unbelieving spouse, or whose children who don't believe in God anymore. Certainly, pray for your loved one – but take courage – you are right to remain faithful to your Lord above all else.

The life of discipleship is a life of sacrifice. Few, if any of us will ever have our physical lives on the line for our faithfulness to Jesus. Yet, faithfulness to Jesus will mean suffering. Sometimes that suffering comes from outside, in the form of ridicule or more serious forms of persecution – this happens in many countries around the world. Other times, the suffering is of a more personal nature. Jesus' overwhelming, sweeping claim on us can mean bearing His cross.

We bear a cross when we hold firmly to God's truth, even when it's inconvenient or out of vogue. We bear our cross when we share the good news about Jesus, only to find ourselves rejected. We bear our cross when we hold to important commitments like regular worship, Confirmation, Sunday School or even simply making time for our families, even if it means riding the bench in your sport or being less available (and less visible) at work. I think of Ruth and her dedication not only to her mother-in-law Naomi but to Naomi's God – our God. She gave up her religion, the very things most dear that didn't mix with what God was calling her into. Counting the cost and bearing the cross means being willing to suffer all in faithfulness to our God.

At the end of the day a faithful disciple is willing to give up all he has. I'm not telling you to put up your house, give away your equity and live on charity – but faithfulness means letting our desires take a backseat to what's best for God's kingdom. Faithful disciples recognize that

God is the owner of all they have and that they are only borrowing His things for a while. We're stewards – and His ownership overwhelms our stewardship.

See this thing that we're doing – this time in worship, this life in the church – it's not a little thing. It's not a side thing. At least, it's not supposed to be. Discipleship overwhelms – it is meant to radically overhaul everything about your life. This hour is meant to overwhelm the other 167 with God's Gifts that strengthen you as He sends you on His mission to love and disciple others. Jesus puts us on the spot today, in an overwhelming, comprehensive question that only the ruler of the whole world has the right to ask of us – how can you use everything I've entrusted to you to be centered on my priorities? EVERYTHING your time, possessions, income, gifts, relationships, abilities, even your very identity belongs to me. I gave them to you so you could use them to serve in my kingdom. Discipleship of Jesus is the single highest level commitment and expectation there is – for everything in our lives to revolve around discipleship.

And that's where the joy comes in. Yes discipleship is hard – most things worth doing are. But Christ lives in our hearts through faith. The strength of the Holy Spirit, too. Rooted and established in love – see, disciples are planted in the love of Jesus. Rooted and established in love – and not alone, with each other, right? Rooted and established in love God provides all that we need. Wide, long, high, deep – there's ample room for disciples to grow in every direction. So we pray for growth as disciples who lead other people to Jesus and make more disciples. God uses us to change the world with His love.

Jesus uses another metaphor, that of salt in our Luke reading. When used for food, salt preserves – it stops things from spoiling by sucking up moisture, which inhibits germs from growing and in so doing, it also purifies. Who purifies us and makes us clean? Our Lord. His very life overwhelms us –as our Lord, risen and victorious over death takes people who were spiritually dead and makes them alive with Him. He lays claim to our very lives! He makes us into a brand new creation that lives for Him and He overwhelms the people we become, improving us constantly so that our thoughts, words and deeds are ever more overwhelmed by His influence on us.

And Jesus' influence overwhelms the flavor of our lives. The staff I worked with on my internship in Florida joked with me for something that happened at a lunch early in my time

there. We were at a Mexican restaurant and I was tired of getting bland, spiceless food at the Mexican places I'd tried so far in Florida. I asked if I could have some habanero salsa with my food. The chef instead cooked the chicken in an habanero sauce. I've had tons of hot sauces, I order my food off the scale, "Thai hot" at Thai restaurants, but this was by far the most unbearably hot thing I've ever eaten. The spice totally overwhelmed the meal.

That target I spoke of in the Ministry Plan – "We are disciples making disciples" is geared toward helping in that flavoring and preserving task. Look for goals involving implementation of Rooted, the new discipleship model Pastor Brad is going to help us get up and running. It's a high level commitment to be part of that can help you see God's mission everywhere around you. It's not to be taken lightly! Also look for goals about helping create resiliency for our youth in a world where so much else screams for attention and allegiance. Look for an emphasis on our encouraging each other because while we shouldn't expect to be able to know everyone here, we do want everyone to be known, cared for in a supportive community, and that goes for everyone new that participates in our life together here, too – church, school, community.