



The Word...

Great crowds were traveling with Jesus,
and he turned and addressed them,
“If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother,
wife and children, brothers and sisters,
and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.
Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me
cannot be my disciple.
Anyone of you who does not renounce all his possessions
cannot be my disciple.”
(from Lk 14:25-33)

Pondering the Word...

I've been writing these reflections for over 10 years now, several times through the lectionary. Sometimes, I look back on what I have written the past to see what I've learned in the ensuing years, and to occasionally recycle ones if they seem pertinent to our current situation. (Spoiler alert: our current situations—weather disasters, governmental and institutional problems, love of money-- haven't changed much over 10 years, any more than they've changed since Jesus' time!)

Here's an excerpt of something from 2014: *“Jesus often uses hyperbole to get his point across, to challenge the “great crowds” and us as well. He's making sure we understand nothing--not even loved ones--can take precedence over our relationship with God...Jesus uses the strong word “hate” to tell us, even though it might be exciting to be among the crowd following him, we must recognize the cost of true discipleship before we make a commitment we can't keep. Reflect on this: Do I have what it takes to be a disciple?*

Do I have what it takes to be a disciple? Well, the answer back in 2014, as it still is today, is “No.” I do not have what it takes. Most of us don't. And that's good news. We need God in our lives, we need to model ourselves after Jesus, to respond as Jesus would, regardless of what our governments, our communities and families, and yes, at times, even our churches tells us. This is tough work and we often fail.

Do I have what it takes to be a disciple? On my own, no—not a chance. With God's Spirit to enlighten and strengthen me; with Christ Jesus to show me the way and to pick me up when I fall? I say, “Let's give a go!”

Living the Word....

I heard a great story recently. One novice priest is being mentored by an older priest who notices the younger one's zeal and fervor. He says to the young priest: *“I have good news and even better news! The good news is that we have a Messiah who is sent to save us. The even better news? It is not you.”*

The people who heard Jesus speak these words 2,000 years ago were not that different from us. I imagine some turned on their heels and went home. I doubt too many said, “Well, sure I have what it takes” —ok, maybe Peter did—but others continued to follow, even when the task seemed daunting, to learn as they went along. We will stumble and we will fail, but remember: when we stumble, we often land on our knees. Pray for the grace to be a disciple, always aware of our need for God and the constant support of our Savior.

Personal Reflections and Ideas... _____

Sep 9: *"It is he whom we proclaim...that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. For this I labor and struggle, in accord with the exercise of his power working within me."* (Col 1:24-2:3)

Paul is true to his Jewish heritage. He is prone to what is sometimes called, "Hebrew hyperbole" — the poetic, but often dramatic use of language to convey the importance of what is being said. Paul says he "labors and struggles to present everyone perfect in Christ," and indeed, he does labor. But he also knows that it's not up to him to make sure everyone is "perfect." He will do his darnedest because of the gift God has given him, but he is not in charge. It can be frustrating to work in religious education or for social justice causes, or as parents whose children have fallen away from the faith. We may feel we are not getting anywhere, that we are failing in the mission God has given us. Let's always remember who's in charge. Just make sure what we labor and struggle for is God's glory and not our own.

Sep 10: *"Brothers and sisters: As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in him, rooted in him and built upon him... See to it that no one captivate you with an empty, seductive philosophy according to the tradition of men, according to the elemental powers of the world, and not according to Christ."* (Col2:6-15)

Important, powerful words. We are to be rooted in Christ, built upon him as our solid foundation—as we walk in him. As we move in him. As we are his eyes, his feet, and his hands upon the earth. Not according to the elemental powers of the world or the traditions of men. This is rich fodder for prayer: Do the philosophies of the world become your roots and keep you from moving closer to Christ?

Sep 11: *"... you have taken off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self..."* (Col 3:1-11)

Paul gives us a long list of "old self" practices: immorality, idolatry, anger, slander, lying, to name a few. And tomorrow, he continues with the "new self" list. Oh, that is would so easy to take off our old selves like we take off a coat! Consider this prayer exercise: What "old self" practices would be on your list? (*We remember today all those who lost their lives this day 18 years ago, and we remember their loved ones as well.*)

Sep 12: *"For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you."* (Lk 6:27-38)

This image begs the question, "From whence do I get what I measure out?" We may start our day with prayer, being filled up with the love of God, but then throughout the day, our patience is tested. We find ourselves involved in unhealthy conversations or situations that drain us of God's presence. We ignore someone in need. We feel we are being used up, and that by day's end, we have no more to give. If that happens to you, remind yourself God's love within you never runs out. Try to pray several times throughout the day, or when you know you will be challenged. It doesn't have to be a big deal, just a quick acknowledgement of God' presence *and* the willingness to access his love.

Sep 13: *"I bless the LORD who counsels me; even in the night my heart exhorts me."* (Ps 16)

As I read this, I was hoping to see the translation of 'my heart exhorting me at night' to be something a little less—well, disruptive to sleep. Here's the original: *"I shall bless the LORD who gave me counsel through the nights that my conscience would lash me."* Yeesch! I think most people who have a conscience know what the psalmist is saying. Our mistakes, our sins and transgressions can keep us up at night. So what might the Lord's counsel to us be? *"Return to the Lord your God...say to him, 'Forgive all inequity,'...'I will heal their defection, I will love them freely.'" (Hosea 14:2-3, 5) "Go first and be reconciled with your brother; then come and offer your gift."* (Mt 5:24)
"In peace, all whole, let me lie down and sleep. For you, LORD, alone, do set me down safely." (Ps 4:9)

Sep 14: *"God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him."* (Jn 3:13-17)

You've probably seen posters held up at sporting events and concerts with the verse Jn 3:16 written for all to see. Have you ever taken this verse and prayed with it? I don't mean Bible recitation, but looking at it as you would a multifaceted gem, holding it in the light to see what word, phrase, or image sparks your imagination. We hear the words of Scripture so often we can fail to grasp their power. Sit with this verse in prayer today, with one slight adaptation--make it present tense: *"God so loves the world that he gives us his only Son."*