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Today's Word/Phrase: Follow

Lesson: Philemon 1-21; Luke 14:25-33

²⁵Now large crowds were traveling with him; and he turned and said to them,
²⁶“Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. ²⁷Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, ³⁰saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ ³¹Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³²If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. ³³So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

Thank you for allowing me to take the time earlier to walk us through Paul's letter to Philemon. The point of Paul's teaching is that love is the governing law for how Christians should conduct our lives. *Love!* What a great message! And then the first thing we hear Jesus say today is “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.” We have our work cut out for us today, don't we?

Notably, Jesus made that comment to the large crowd that was following him. Apparently all the things that he had been doing and teaching were creating a spectacle. He was displaying power over diseases, disabilities, and demons. The more

he did all that, even more people wanted to be present for the next big thing. Hence a large crowd began to follow him. But there is a difference between following Jesus for the spectacle and following Jesus because he reveals the way of life that appeals to you. What he was doing was revealing the kingdom of God that is in our midst. What does that look like, though? It is a way of life that shows care to everyone, even the dispossessed. It is a way of life that sees the image of God in every person, even the ones whom society has shunned. It is a way of life that recognizes that God is present and provides hope in our human suffering, even when that suffering results from the practice of brutal Roman crucifixion. That is what the kingdom of God looks like, and we get to experience it now. It is our way of life. But does everyone realize that this way of life comes at a cost?

That is what Jesus tried to convey to the large crowd. Let's be clear: Jesus was using hyperbole when he says we need to hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even life itself in order to follow him. It's extreme language to get a point across; Jesus doesn't want you to take it literally. Sometimes we may have to let go of certain relationships if the other person regularly devalues the image of God that we bear, or if they want us to devalue, belittle, or hate others. I would characterize such a relationship as abusive. We might have to let those relationships go in order to be free to follow the path of Jesus, which values all people, especially the outcasts. On the other hand, if the people in your life – the fathers, mothers, spouses, kids, siblings, and friends – if they inspire you to love and value other people, then of course Jesus would want you to keep those relationships close to you.

After that initial comment by Jesus, he offers a quick succession of metaphors; all of them are related to planning ahead. He is effectively saying to the crowd, “Okay,

you are intrigued by the spectacle and you want to follow. That's great. You are welcome to come along for the ride, but you should know where this path is headed." The first metaphor is of someone who intends to build a tower, so this person first sits down to figure out the costs and determines whether it can be completed. I can't help but think of the countless hours of planning and the mental energy that has been poured into this renovation at All Saints. I hope you will share your thanks to the members of the Building Committee, the Council, the Worship Committee, and the numerous others who have in various ways put a lot of effort into getting this project completed.

Like the metaphor Jesus shared, these people have done the estimating and the planning to build this tower, and they've done it very well. Next week's rededication will be a time for all of us to celebrate what we have all done together, and I can't wait for it. But the work doesn't end next week, both literally and spiritually. The planning has gone into the physical building, but Jesus asks us to do the spiritual planning for following his way of life. So let's view this new chapter at All Saints as an opportunity to do that; to prayerfully ask God to shape our hearts, our aspirations, our use of time, talent, and treasure, so that they be guided by the values of God's kingdom: love, mercy, compassion, inclusion, and welcome. Don't be scared by the hyperbole that Jesus uses in the lesson; people can live by those values of God's kingdom, we just have to lean into them, into God, and into each other. May this new chapter at All Saints be an opportunity for us to do that spiritual work as we continue together on this path of following Jesus. Amen.