

## **Give It Up and Follow Me!** **Luke 14:25-33**

I led a preaching seminar a few weeks ago. I asked pastors what is most challenging for their preaching ministry. One pastor answered that they have to prepare too many sermons. You know, the seminar was for Korean clergy and Korean churches have at least three big sermons + six mini-sermons for early morning prayer. One pastor responded that people have heard about sermons on the same text many times so it's difficult to preach something new out of familiar texts. One pastor answered that he could not live as he preached so he struggled with a question, "Can I preach, even if I couldn't live as I preach?" As a preacher, I have the same struggle. If I could live as I preached, I could be a saint... St. Yohan sounds much holier than Rev. Dr. Yohan. But I have to admit that I couldn't always live as I preached. I tried but I am not always successful. So when the sermon text is difficult like today's text, I often wonder if I can preach this text because I cannot live like what I should preach.

### **1 page: Whoever comes to me...**

In today's scripture, Jesus said "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." (Luke 14:26) Can you do this? Um. Let's be honest here. That's not going to happen. I love Juhee and Joy. I know that Carlos loves Hanna and Grace very much and I bet it's impossible for Carlos to hate them. But Jesus tells us to hate our mothers and fathers, wives and children and family in order to follow him. Under these conditions would you be a disciple or remain a good husband and wife or father and mother?

The first demand seems to be an impossible task. But along with this, Jesus requested two other things. "carry your own cross, and give up all your possessions" in order to become his disciples. None of these are easy things to accomplish. In fact, none of these seems to be possible to achieve. Do you still want to follow Jesus? Can we really follow him? If following Jesus is grace, it must be costly grace.

One of the essences of the Christian faith is self-transcendence. We believe that our lives come from God, the Creator, and return to God. We exist in relation to God, and our souls yearn to seek the union with God. To reach to the true union with God, we must transcend our ego, our desire, ourselves and break the shell of our small world. Our faith journey is a process of this self-transcendence, moving toward the union with God. For this task, we first need to be freed from all things that bind us. What binds us? Of course family.

I had a phone call with my friend a few years ago. He told me, "I want to quit my doctoral study." He really loved studying theology and I knew how hard he worked to get into the doctoral program. So I asked him why he wanted to quit. He answered, "I can endure the financial difficulties but I cannot bear watching my family suffer from financial challenges any longer. Why do they have to suffer because of my dreams?" He was even willing to sacrifice his dream for his family. I know that many of you have sacrificed your lives to raise your children

and provide them with better opportunities for a better future. I know your acts of self-sacrifice come out of your love for your children and family. However, we have to admit that no matter how much we love our family, our relationships also acts as bondage to us. And when we are bound to these relationships, we cannot follow Jesus.

We are also bound to our possession. In his article, “Do we possess our possessions or do they possess us?,” Bruce Hoodis, a professor of developmental psychology at the University of Bristol in the UK, explains that our emotional connection to our property can be an extension of our identity. We don’t simply possess our possessions but at the same time, our possession possess us in a certain extent. When we are bound to our relationship, our possession and our ego, we are locked in our small world and live as if that’s everything. But Jesus is telling us, “Give up everything.” This sounds demanding but this is grace that invites us to true life.

### **Jesus invites all to true life**

When I first prepared this sermon, I couldn’t really find ‘good news’ in this text. What Jesus said sounds like demanding things we could not possibly accomplish. It sounds like putting another heavy religious burden on our shoulders. However, as I re-read the text over and over again, verse 25<sup>th</sup> caught my attention. “Now large crowds were traveling with him, and he turned and said to them.” While many people often gathered around Jesus, most of Jesus’ teachings were directed only to his disciples. But in this text, Jesus directly spoke to the crowd. It means that Jesus invited all people to true life regardless of who they were. This is good news for us. The rich or the poor, the strong or the weak, the capable or the incapable... all people are invited to this journey of self-transcendence and transformation.

Jesus asked people to count the cost of following him. “Is there anyone here who, planning to build a new house, doesn’t first sit down and figure the cost so you’ll know if you can complete it? Or can you imagine a king going into battle against another king without first deciding whether it is possible with his ten thousand troops to face the twenty thousand troops of the other? And if he decides he can’t, won’t he send an emissary and work out a truce?” How does this Jesus’ word sound to you? Does this sound like “following me is difficult and you cannot follow me so give up!” or does Jesus’ word sound like “it’s a difficult path but come on, we can do it together! So give up things that bind you and follow me!” When I first read this, I leaned more toward the first interpretation. However, as I mediate it, my interpretation has changed.

What would happen when people count the cost of the discipleship? People would know that following Jesus is not easy, of course. But at the same time, they would know true blessings, joy or the higher purpose of life to which they are called. They also would know they do not walk alone on this path.

Jesus is telling us, “Give up everything. Everything. Every thing. Father, mother, wife, children, family, possessions. Jesus is telling us “give it up! Your pride and greed, your gifts and talents, your anxiety and worries, the thing that gives you joy and the thing that makes you happy. Everything! “Give it up. And follow me!” The more we give up, the more we become

free and so we can follow Jesus. Ironically, the more we become free from our obsession with family and possession, we can truly love our family, friends, and neighbors as Christ loves them.

As you know, my father passed away in 2009 in an accident. Of course, my mother was the person who suffered the most from his passing. But a mother's love always puts her children first over her own well-being. Since I had to come back to the United States, my mother worried about me. She prayed for me every day in her early morning prayers. One day, God asked her, "did you raise Yohan or is it me who raised him thus far?" She admitted it was God who raised me. "You raised him God." After that experience, she told me, "I pray for you but do not worry about you as I had before." I believe she was liberated from her familial shackles by sharing her concerns to God.

We may not be able to be completely free from the concerns we have for our children and family. But we have to admit we cannot give them everything they need. Rather, it is God who steers their lives and their needs. The well-being of our family ultimately relies on the generosity of our God. If we admit that God takes care of our family, then, we can lift our family bounds and be dedicated servants to God.

Jesus asks us, "give up everything, carry your cross and follow me." What Jesus demands sound impossible. Giving up everything! But think of what will be left for us if we give up everything? If we give up our family, possession, our ego and even our selves for Christ, all that is left is you and me whom God dearly loves. All that is left in us is the love Christ pours in us. With that love, we can truly love our family, friend and neighbors. Rev. Dr. Derek Weber wrote, what Jesus really ask is "Don't love them with your love; love them with mine....We can't love them like they need to be loved. We can't even love them like we want to love them. But in his love, we can love the way he loves."<sup>1</sup> Be free from all bondage! Give up our feeble and broken love that is selfish and temporary and almost looks like hate. Rather, follow Christ so that we can love them as Christ loves.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/having-words-with-jesus/thirteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-c/thirteenth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-c-preaching-notes>