

**Proper 18 – 15 Pentecost – Year C – September 8, 2010 - Homily**  
**Jeremiah 18:1-11; Psalm 139:1-5, 12-17; Philemon 1-21; Luke 14:25-33**  
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We've all received those offers that are too good to be true in the mail. The part that the advertisers want us to read and get hooked into is always in really big font sizes and bright colors. Then there's the small print. It is usually in a font that even with 20/20 vision we would be hard pressed to actually be able to read. It is even sometimes hard to find – even smaller than the little asterisk that tells us it exists somewhere in the package. You know what I mean. Steve and I are currently reading through the Old Testament book of 2 Samuel, the one that tells the frank story of King David, his peccadilloes, and his murderous deeds in order to get what he wanted. Despite the redactors, or editors if you like, that worked on many parts of the Scriptures, the honesty of the Bible texts still attracts me and gives me confidence in God's love and grace. David's story is one of many, where actions are revealed for what they are, or as the Gospel of Luke says in the prophetic voice of Simeon to Mary concerning Jesus, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed" (Luke 2:34-35). Secrets are told in bold print in Scripture, and so frequently in life the truth has a way of being revealed. Tonight's reading from Luke is another example of where the hard details of the contract are not hidden away, but offered to us all for our serious prayer and discernment.

In a nutshell, the Gospel reading this week concerns what we have neatly termed, the cost of discipleship. As a Jewish man of His day, Jesus pulls no punches, but tells it like it is, albeit with delightful middle-eastern hyperbole. However, even with the exaggerated descriptors that are designed to capture our attention, the truth is plainly offered that following God in Christ Jesus is not for wimps or to be undertaken lightly. I always tell the parents of Baptismal candidates or the candidate themselves if they are adults that God does not demand much, just our whole self. Being a disciple of Jesus is not a hobby that we devote a small portion of our time to each day or each week. Being a disciple of Jesus is about giving our lives to Christ, one hundred percent. The good news is that until we get there, we are covered by God's grace. In fact, German theologian and pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer once wrote, "the call to discipleship is a gift of grace and that call is inseparable from grace." A life filled with grace is also one in transformation, and that gift of transformation is God working outwards from within, just as we do our own work from the outside in. Jesus is speaking about the ways that we close the gaps between our basic humanity and Christ-likeness by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus lets us know up front what we can expect in this journey of movement and change. First of all, we can expect our most intimate relationships to be transformed by our commitment to following Christ. This is partly about becoming less selfish, and partly about recognizing the Body of Christ as a new family, a new community who will be there for us, support us and vice versa. Our reorientation to our new family empowers us to love God above all others. When Jesus speaks of the need for us to pick up our cross, it is how the Holy Spirit transforms us to deal with suffering and loss, and to respond to the challenges and trials of life and relationships. We move from fear, anger and despair, to hope, and patient forbearance, free from bitterness in all the circumstances of our lives, and free to practice resurrection living now. When Jesus speaks of the need to give up all our possessions, He is not literally telling us to put ourselves on the street and become dependent on charity and welfare. That is not being a good steward of God's gifts! Jesus is speaking about the

need to avoid being possessed by earthly things, and to use our God-given gifts rightly in daily life. When we find a place of simplicity in living, and freedom from excessive indulgences, as well as faithful stewardship, then we are free to open our hands to receive all God's gifts, and to share them with others. When this element of freedom is truly part of our lives then we begin to see more clearly that we own nothing and no one, but are dependent on God alone. In each of these changes, we become co-creators of our new identity in Christ, ever closing those gaps along the way, drawing closer to God as God fills us from within. And in so doing, by our very being and way of life, we are shaping the world around us into the kingdom of God on earth. It sounds a bit like entering the witness protection program, where for our ultimate good, we must let go of our old selves, and become a new creation in Christ.

To put it another way, it is perhaps more obvious today than ever before that there are huge demands on our time and many competing priorities. If we work six days a week, do we come to church on Sunday morning or do laundry and spend some time with our family? If our income source is not as reliable as it once was, do we stop tithing to God's work through the church, or give up our vacation this year? The reality is that there are conflicting and competing interests all around us. Yet discipleship has a way of reordering our values, and priorities. The changes are wrought in us over time through the Holy Spirit. It is a way for Jesus to become the sorting principle in the giant 'to do' list of life. Jesus becomes our new template or rubric for living according to God's will, and embodying self-offering and love, mercy and compassion. Whenever we feel there is a conflict or a choice to be made we can check against the rubric and ask God to guide us in our decisions.

One such journey of transforming faith is C.S. Lewis' story from atheism to Christianity. He shares some of his newfound wisdom in his book, *Mere Christianity*. After reading *Mere Christianity*, Chaplain Jim Smith writes, "I was brought to my knees... I suddenly knew I was wrong. I had been trying to keep my self and its desires intact. Christ was merely an addition to my self. After reading [Lewis] I resolved to live each day consciously listening to the voice of Christ and letting the new self – the one that Christ gave me – come to life." There is a cost to our discipleship, but given the steadfast love and faithfulness of the One we follow, the benefits greatly outweigh the cost of giving up our selves, and picking up our cross. For everything that we give back to God, we are so often blessed in manifold ways. Surrendering to the transforming power of God's love is our gift to God in becoming followers of Christ Jesus. In turn, God blesses us and uses us to be a continuing gift to the world, sharing the Good News, in which there is no unreadable small print, just God's love.

Amen.