

*Now when Jesus saw a crowd around him, he gave orders to go over to the other side. And a scribe came up and said to him, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.” And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” Another of the disciples said to him, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” And Jesus said to him, “Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.”* Matthew 8:18-22

Some of you may have heard the name Yakov Smirnoff. He is the Soviet-born American comedian, actor and writer who emigrated to the United States in 1977. He tells of when he first came to the United States from Russia; he just wasn't prepared for the incredible variety of instant products available in grocery stores. He says, "On my first shopping trip, I saw powdered milk--you just add water, and you get milk. Then I saw powdered orange juice--you just add water, and you get orange juice. And then I saw baby powder, and I thought to myself, what a country!" Well, these kinds of conveniences can also be found in Canada when it comes to the ease and comfort and prosperity of life we enjoy all across the North American continent. The problem is, somewhere along the way we became convinced that the Christian faith is the same - just add some water and “instant Christianity.” All we need to do is invite Jesus into our hearts, say a few prayers, read our Bibles from time to time, attend church when it's convenient, and we are good to go. God understands our struggles. He loves us. He promises to forgive us. God wants us to be happy. Jesus died so we could be happy today and forever.

Is this what it means to be a Christian? Is this what the life of a follower of Jesus Christ looks like? Is this what our Lord and Savior expects from his disciples? Is this the fulfillment of the standard we expect to see when “we passionately proclaim the glory of God in Christ for the joy of all people”?

The German Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer would say – “No.” Bonhoeffer resisted the anti-Christian national socialism of the Nazis during WWII. He was arrested and imprisoned in Buchenwald and hung by the Gestapo in 1945. Before the end of his life he published a book entitled "The Cost of Discipleship" in which Bonhoeffer describe what a true follower, a disciple of Jesus looked like. Early in his book he defines the ease, comfort and prosperity of Instant Christianity to be that of “cheap grace.”

“Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our church... Cheap grace is the grace that is represented as the Church's inexhaustible treasury, from which she showers blessings with generous hands, without asking questions or fixing limits. . . . Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate. Costly grace ... is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble, it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him. . . . When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”

When Dietrich Bonhoeffer followed Jesus, it did literally did cost him his life. While that's not the case for most of us who are truly following Christ, we are all called to live sacrificial lives for Jesus. The main essential characteristic of the Christian life is sacrificial discipleship. In Luke 9:23-25 Jesus declared: *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?”* In John 12:24-26 he said: *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.”* Martin Luther said, “A religion (Christian faith) that gives nothing, costs nothing, and suffers nothing, is worth nothing.” The activist Jesuit priest Daniel Joseph Berrigan, "If you want to follow Jesus, you had better look good on wood."

Jesus speaks of this sacrificial call to discipleship in our text for today. The words we read today stand in the greater context of the gospel written by the apostle Matthew, who emphasized Jesus as Sovereign King, framed within the concept of the Kingdom of God, where Jesus rules and reigns in the hearts of those who surrender their lives to Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Today we also stand in the nearer context of the Sermon in the Mount, where Jesus spoke of what Kingdom character looks like in those who truly follow him, as well as how that Kingdom conduct should flow out of those who possess Kingdom character. And today we stand in the immediate context of where Matthew records the power of Jesus words that revealed the power of his works by his divine authority over the struggle of pain and the suffering of sickness and disease. In our text for today, we will sit under Jesus authority again, as he clearly tells what he demands from those who claim to truly follow him. In his words we will hear what it will cost us to make and follow through on the commitment to be a disciple of the Kingdom of God.

*Now when Jesus saw a crowd around him, he gave orders to go over to the other side. And a scribe came up and said to him, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." Another of the disciples said to him, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." And Jesus said to him, "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead." Matthew 8:18-22*

Our text opens with Jesus noticing a large crowd was growing around him, and we read he instructed his disciples to cross to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. The text before this reminds us that He had healed a leprous man and a centurion's servant and Peter's mother-in-law in Matthew 8:16-17 we read, *"That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: 'He took our illnesses and bore our diseases.'"* Clearly word of Jesus' miracle healings was getting out and groups of people were showing up to see what was going on. *"Now when Jesus saw a crowd around him, he gave orders to go over to the other side."* In the original language of this passage, when we're told that Jesus "saw" a crowd about him, the word that is used suggests far more than just a mere passing glance. It suggests a careful, reflective kind of look. He saw the crowd, evaluated what he saw, then gave orders to depart to the other side of the lake. Jesus' order to move away from the crowd reveals Jesus' heart call for truly committed disciples - *because* he knew the crowd was gathering around him not because they were truly committed to follow him but because they wanted to see him perform miracles. Numerous times we read of Jesus' turning away from crowds that were not truly committed to follow Him.

*Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man. John 2:23-25*

*Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself. . . . When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves." John 6:15, 25-26*

*When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this, said to them, "Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe." (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.) And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father." After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. John 6:60-66*

Jesus clearly wasn't interested in becoming popular with the crowds. He was only interested in building the character and conduct of the Kingdom of God into the lives of sold-out, devoted disciples who would follow him and obey him with a complete sacrificial commitment. Jesus is not after quantity of numbers of his followers as much as he is for the quality of commitment of those who follow him. We see that in the two men we read of in our text for today, who approach Jesus, seeking to be his true disciples.

*And a scribe came up and said to him, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."*

Here we read that the Kingdom commitment to be a true disciple of Jesus will cost us our "home" - because we tend to love our home on earth and everything the world offers us, more than we love God.

We read that a scribe, which is a Jewish scholar whose job it was to copy and know the Old Testament scriptures, approaches Jesus and says, *"Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go."* The Greek actually reads, "I will follow you wherever you *may* go." These words make the scribes' proposal a sincere one. This scribe really wanted to be Jesus' disciple. But Jesus does not affirm that. Instead, he addresses the scribe like we will see him address the rich young man in Matthew 19:16-22 by telling him there is one thing he lacks. Jesus replies to his proposal by simply describing the difficulties of his own experience, *"Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."*

Jesus was telling the scribe that if he wanted to be a true follower of Jesus, he would have to be willing to be without a home. Even the humble creatures of nature have a place to lay their head at night. But Jesus - who revealed himself to the scribe as someone far higher than any earthly creature - *"the Son of Man"* - had no such creaturely comforts upon the earth. He didn't have a place to lay His head at night. It is most likely that Jesus chose to use the name *"the Son of Man"* to speak more deeply to this scribe. The message and mission of the gospel of Jesus Christ in building the Kingdom of God are much more important than having a home in this world and having the roots of our lives planted in this world.

We see the depths of this when we consider that the scribes of the day would have been quite familiar with the passages in the Scriptures that spoke of the Messiah. This scribe would have been remarkably equipped to see that Jesus was fulfilling the prophecies about the Messiah before his very eyes; and he would have realized, more than most people, that all that the Scriptures promised about the Messiah's earthly kingdom would be fulfilled in Jesus. All of the gospel writers tell us that many who followed Jesus, did so for that reason. Most likely this scribe was looking to follow Jesus as the fast-track to the glories of the return of the earthly kingdom to the chosen people of God. But Jesus' answer threw water on the scribe's worldly expectations of comfort and exaltation that would be fulfilled by following Jesus. Oh, the glories of comfort and exaltation would come, but not in the way and for the purpose that God's people had expected. But the suffering and death of Jesus Christ on a cross would come first.

The truth is, there are many who follow Jesus with the same sort of worldly expectations. They expect by that by following Jesus, they have a fast-track to financial and material blessings - and that it would be a means by which they won't have as many pains, struggles, sufferings, trials and tribulations in life. The truth is, biblically speaking, truly following Jesus will very well lead to more pains, struggles, sufferings, trials and tribulations in life than we would have had otherwise. The apostle Paul affirms this in 2 Timothy 3:12: *"Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."* Jesus also affirms this in John 15:20: *"A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you."* But Jesus also affirmed God's blessing on those who endure pains, struggles, sufferings and tribulations because they are fully committed to be a true disciple, *"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you"* (Matt. 5:11). *"In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."* (John 16:33).

The Word of God tells us that those are seeking the Kingdom commitment to be a true disciple of Jesus will not have a true home in this world – but rather *they will only be at home when they are with God*, wherever they are on earth. In John 14:23 Jesus tells us: *“If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”* In John 14:2-3 Jesus said: *“In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”* Our home on earth is with God and Jesus has prepared a home for us with us in heaven! The blessing of embracing the reality that God is our home is our constant acknowledgement of His continued presence in our lives and will wean us of our love for everything that the world offers us.

*“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”* Matthew 6:19-21

*He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. . . So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.*

*For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.*

*So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.*

2 Corinthians 4:14, 16-18; 5:1-9

The Kingdom commitment to be a true disciple of Jesus will cost us our “home” - because of our fallen nature, we tend to love our home on earth and everything the world offers us, more than we love God. But if we truly have saving faith in Jesus Christ, we will yearn to pursue the Kingdom commitment of sacrificially following Jesus – because we will know pleasing God is worth the loss of all things in this earth, for the surpassing value of knowing Christ, and even of sharing in His sufferings. Christ in us today is the hope of glory tomorrow. It is in glorious presence of Jesus alone that we will be finally and fully at home. And Christ’s presence with us today is what makes any place of service to him our home.

*Another of the disciples said to him, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” And Jesus said to him, “Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.”*

Here we read that the Kingdom commitment to be a true disciple of Jesus will cost us our “family” - because of our fallen nature, we tend to love our families and love our lives on earth, more than we love God. Here we read of a second man who approaches Jesus. This man was not a scribe, but rather Matthew calls this man a *“disciple.”* To one extent or another, this man was already following Jesus. In the context of Jesus’s conversation about the sacrificial commitment Jesus expects from those who are his disciples, this man says: *“Lord, let me first go and bury my father.”* Now; on the surface, this seems like a noble request. After all, who is more excusable from a duty than a man who needs to attend to the needs of his father who has just passed about? But Jesus wasn’t buying it and he responds to the disciples’ request by stating something that, on the surface, seems somewhat cruel and insensitive: *“Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.”*

If we take a closer look at this text, we can see where Jesus was coming from. For one thing, the man was called "*another of the disciples*" which means this man had already made the sacrificial commitment to follow Jesus. Second, Jesus' command to "*Follow me*" was given as a present tense command; and can be translated, "*Keep following me*". It was as if the man was already a follower of Jesus who was confronted with the fact that Jesus was about to leave; and that he himself was about to stop following for a while in order to attend to his father. And third, the man used a key word that pointed out the whole nature of his problem. The word was "*first*." He said: "*Lord, let me first go and bury my father.*"

The man had already made the sacrificial commitment to follow Jesus; but was about to stop following Jesus because of what he considered to a greater priority than following Jesus - that of attending to his own father's funeral and Jesus says, "*Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.*" In the context of the teachings in God's Word and Jesus speaking numerous times about being respectful to our parents - Jesus' answer suggests that other people could have attended to what needed to be done for the man's father. The problem then was not so much about respectively taking care of one's parents as it was about this disciples' divided loyalties, which would have come as result of the man's failure to make a break from the earthly concerns that continued to hold him back in his following Jesus.

What we are seeing here is that this man had begun to follow Jesus; but he hadn't realized that following Jesus meant placing the call of Jesus Christ and the priorities of Jesus Christ above all other calls and priorities in his life. This "*disciple*" didn't realize that to follow Jesus meant loving Jesus more than loving his own father, and to place Jesus' concerns over all other earthly commitments. We see the same today, as many who claim Christ begin to follow Jesus; only to find out along the way that following Jesus conflicts with other demands of life - even some of the most basic of human demands. Jesus may not call everyone to forsake such earthly concerns in so radical a way, as he did here. But then again, Jesus just might; and actually, he most probably will, when you make a true sacrificial commitment to follow Jesus, in your pursuit to be a true disciple. If we love any one of the members of our families more than we love Jesus, we are not in love enough with Jesus to be used by God.

In Matthew 10:34-39 Jesus said, "*Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*"

Jesus Christ can bring a division into our families. But the only right kind of division He brings is a division between being for or against Jesus Christ. Our Lord and take a family whose every member is against and turn some of its members into follows of Jesus. That happened with both Nancy and I – and its happened with a few members of our families. This is true of any family, but there are many stories of Muslims who have been completely disowned by their families for becoming a Christian. Our brother Ahmad has shared those stories with us, along with blessing of so many conversions of his own family. The Kingdom commitment to be a true disciple of Jesus will cost us our "family" - because of our fallen nature, we tend to love our families and love our lives on earth, more than we love God. This is true for all of us, to various degrees, as a natural of effect of living in a culture and society that promotes rights, entitlement, and privilege rather than truth, responsibility and respect - which causes us to love ourselves and love our lives more than we love God. In John 12:25 Jesus said: "*Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.*" A contextual paraphrase of this verse would be: "Whoever loves his life more than he loves God, will lose the life that God lovingly offers him through the cross of Jesus Christ – but whoever rejects the life that the world offers him, will live in the Kingdom of God, where Jesus will rule and reign, forever and ever, when he sacrificially surrenders his life for Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior."

There are at least two blessings that comes with the Kingdom commitment to be a true disciple of Jesus which costs us our family. The first is - that when we love God more than our family, we are then able to love our family like God loves our family - *because* God loves our families more than we are capable of doing. His divine love for our families is much greater, stronger and deeper than our human love, that is tainted with our fallen nature, could ever be. The second blessing that comes with the Kingdom commitment to be a true disciple of Jesus which costs us our family - is that God gives us new, diverse, expansive, intimate, eternal physical and spiritual family in the family of God, the bride of Christ, the body of Christ, the church. In Christ, we are all members of this family, we are all brothers and sisters today and tomorrow and forever. In this family we are members of the Kingdom of God, in pursuit of the inner character of the Kingdom of God that is spiritually-poor, sin-grieving, humbly-dependent, God-pursuing, merciful, pure-hearted, peace-seeking, joyful endurance-in-the-face-of- persecution – because Jesus Christ is our Sovereign King, Lord and Savior. We see this in Luke’s version of our text.

*As they were going along the road, someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” To another he said, “Follow me.” But he said, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” And Jesus said to him, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” Yet another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” Luke 9:57-62*

At Arrowsmith we seek to passionately proclaim the glory of God in Christ for the joy of all people. In order to follow that vision and fulfill that mission we need sacrificially committed disciples to do so. Those disciples *are us*. I pray today you would consider where you are when it comes to your calling to follow Jesus. There are some things we do in the church that reflect the steps of our journey in following Jesus. *Baptism* is a symbol of our surrender to Jesus Christ; *Church Membership* is a reflection of our commitment to Jesus Christ; *Service* is an indicator of our obedience to Jesus Christ. Each one of those steps draws us closer to God and deeper into the Kingdom of God and fills us up with more of God.

Jan David Hettinga once wrote: “Salvation is the free gift of God that costs you everything.” The cost of the cross – Jesus Christ’s death on a cross, in our place, for our sins - costs us nothing. But following the resurrected Jesus Christ after his crucifixion – costs us *everything*. Jesus said: *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?”* Jesus is elevating his call to “follow me” above all other allegiances. Anything that gets in the way of unqualified commitment to him must be set aside. Dietrich Bonhoeffer would define this as “Costly grace” which “is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble, it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him. . . . When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”

There is a cost to making a sacrificial commitment of follow Jesus. But the cost nothing compared to the blessing of following Jesus, who *“is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross”* (Colossians 1:15-20).