

**Year C: Proper 18a Jer 18:1-11; Ps 139:1-5; 13-17; Philemon 1-21; Lk 14:25-33
St Barnabas, Florissant – September 08, 2019**

Focus Sentence: How much are we willing to risk to be Jesus' disciples?

Again this morning, we have hard words coming at us from the writings of Jeremiah the prophet. Using the analogy of a potter who becomes dissatisfied with a vessel he's working on, God speaks through Jeremiah to tell us that God can also change God's mind and either bring disaster on, or do good to, a nation depending on that nation's faithfulness to God.

God goes on to warn us that the potter isn't happy with us, but tells us to "turn now, ...away from [our] evil way, and amend [our] ways and [our] doings." The good news here is that, with God there is *always* the chance for repentance and newness of life.

PAUSE

Our response to Jeremiah's warning is the beautiful Psalm 139. In this poem, the Psalmist describes how God has searched out and known him, how God discerns his thoughts from afar, how God is acquainted with all his ways, and how God knows every word on the Psalmist's lips, even before that word is uttered.

The Psalmist goes on to describe how God created his inmost parts, knitting him together in his mother's womb, while he was being made in secret and woven in the depths of the earth.

I'm sure that we would agree with the Psalmist when he says that this knowledge is too wonderful for him, so high that he cannot attain to it.

PAUSE

I don't know if you noticed, but there are some verses missing from today's Psalm, namely verses 6 through 11. I got curious to know what the composers of the Lectionary had left out.

Please let me share with you those even more beautiful verses:

- 6 Where can I go then from your Spirit? *
where can I flee from your presence?
- 7 If I climb up to heaven, you are there; *
if I make the grave my bed, you are there also.
- 8 If I take the wings of the morning *
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
- 9 Even there your hand will lead me *
and your right hand hold me fast.
- 10 If I say, "Surely the darkness will cover me, *
and the light around me turn to night,"
- 11 Darkness is not dark to you;
the night is as bright as the day; *
darkness and light to you are both alike.

In other words, sisters and brothers, what this Psalm is really telling us in these beautiful images is that God knows each and every one of us fully and completely. There is not one single thing about me that God doesn't know. And, what is even more amazing, God fully and completely loves you and loves me in spite of that complete knowledge. We are fully known and fully loved. I'm sure that each one of us has something deep down inside, something that goes sort of like this, "Oh those people really like me, but if they only knew.....such and such." Well, God knows it, and STILL loves me.....and always will.

That really is knowledge that is "too wonderful for me, so high that I cannot attain to it."

PAUSE

But how can we even begin to respond to this great love from God? Well, I believe we get at least a clue in today's Gospel reading.

PAUSE

Jesus seems to be demanding the impossible when he says to the large crowds, “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. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”

You and I claim to be Jesus’ disciples, we claim to be Christians, but do we really HATE our parents, our spouses and children, our siblings, and even life itself? And is this REALLY what Jesus demands of us, if we do want to be Christians, to be Jesus’ disciples?

Well, the word HATE, which is used here in the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, seems to have a lot of baggage coming with it in today’s world: baggage that involves racism, sexism, oppression, violence, and anger, to name just a bit. Is Jesus then really saying that we can’t be his disciples if we can’t hate?

Maybe we can find out that HATE in the Semitic context of Jesus’ time can be better translated as *turning away from* or *detaching oneself from* or *turning one’s back on someone/something*.

Those are still tough words, but let’s look at what Jesus is really saying here. Maybe you know of someone who made a decision to go to seminary and who then found out that their own parents not only refused to bless their decision but also effectively cut them off.

Maybe we’ve also heard stories about people who want to convert to a different religious tradition from their families or communities, and these people are also cut off. Remember in the play/movie *Fiddler on the Roof*, how Tevye reacted when his daughter fell in love with a Russian? He forbade her to marry. So they eloped, married in a Russian Orthodox village church, and she was disowned by her father.

I believe that Jesus is saying that we have to be ready to walk away from, to turn our backs on, even our families, if they stand in the way of our relationship with God.

PAUSE

And Jesus goes on to warn us that we'd better count up the true COST of the discipleship we're claiming to want. Just like the tower-builder who didn't have the resources to finish, or the king who didn't have enough troops, we had better wisely think about just what costs are involved in being Jesus' disciple. Are we ready to incur those costs?

Jesus concludes by saying that none of can become his disciples if we do not give up all our possessions.

These are more tough words from Jesus, and I believe that they are more fully understood if we remember that he is addressing them to the "crowd," many of whom were following Jesus because of what they could get FROM Jesus – food, healing, excitement. Jesus had probably had enough, and was saying, "Look, being my follower, my disciple, demands faithfulness, uncompromising love of all, willingness to endure the scorn of others, courage to change, and strength to face up to injustice and evil *as you do something about it*. And that's just for starters."

Or, to put it yet another way, in return for being fully known, and yet fully loved by God, what are we willing to RISK in return? Those possessions Jesus is telling us we must be willing to give up, don't they include what's most dear to us? Don't they include our dearly-held opinions and prejudices? And are we willing to risk, to give up even these dearly-held possessions? Are we willing to risk change, to step off the cliff with Jesus, believing that we'll be caught and sustained by the full and complete love of God? Are we even willing to invite "them" into our church?

PAUSE

I'm not saying that this is easy, sisters and brothers. And, as Jesus warns, we had better carefully consider the cost before we commit ourselves.

Fully known, yet fully loved. That's the prize. So, what are we willing to risk in return in order to follow after Jesus?

Each of us has to answer that question from deep in our own hearts, but meanwhile, let's close our reflections by praying again this morning's Collect: Grant us, O Lord, to trust in you with all our hearts; for, as you always resist the proud who confide in their own strength, so you never forsake those who make their boast of your mercy, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, on God, now and for ever.

AMEN