

Pentecost 13

Sept 4, 2022

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

15 "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. **16** If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God^[a] that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules,^[b] then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. **17** But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, **18** I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. **19** I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, **20** loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them."

Psalm 1

1 Happy are they who have not walked in the counsel | of the wicked,*

nor lingered in the way of sinners, nor sat in the seats | of the scornful!

2 Their delight is in the law | of the LORD,*

and they meditate on his law | day and night.

3 They are like trees planted by streams of water,

bearing fruit in due season, with leaves that | do not wither;*

everything they | do shall prosper.

4 It is not so | with the wicked;*

they are like chaff which the wind | blows away.

5 Therefore the wicked shall not stand upright when | judgment comes,*

nor the sinner in the council | of the righteous.

⁶ For the LORD knows the way | of the righteous,*
but the way of the wick- | ed is doomed.

Philemon 1-25

¹ Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,
To Philemon our beloved fellow worker ² and Apphia our sister and Archippus
our fellow soldier, and the church in your house:

³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴ I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, ⁵ because
I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and
for all the saints, ⁶ and I pray that the sharing of your faith may become
effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake
of Christ.^[a] ⁷ For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my

brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.

⁸ Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to
do what is required, ⁹ yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you—I, Paul,
an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus— ¹⁰ I appeal to you
for my child, Onesimus,^[b] whose father I became in my
imprisonment. ¹¹ (Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed
useful to you and to me.) ¹² I am sending him back to you, sending my very
heart. ¹³ I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might
serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel, ¹⁴ but I
preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness
might not be by compulsion but of your own accord. ¹⁵ For this perhaps is
why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back
forever, ¹⁶ no longer as a bondservant^[c] but more than a bondservant, as a
beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the
flesh and in the Lord.

¹⁷ So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive
me. ¹⁸ If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my
account. ¹⁹ I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it—to say
nothing of your owing me even your own self. ²⁰ Yes, brother, I want some
benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ.

²¹ Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say. ²² At the same time, prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that through your prayers I will be graciously given to you.

²³ Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, ²⁴ and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.

²⁵ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Luke 14:25-33

²⁵ Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, ²⁶ "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸ For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, ³⁰ saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' ³¹ Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³² And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. ³³ So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

Message: Violated Expectations

Some years ago there was a movie starring Goldie Hahn called Private Benjamin. It was the story of a spoiled rich girl who bought into misleading army recruiting posters that suggested practically a country-club life of travel and recreation. Her first morning of Bootcamp was a harsh wake-up call and Hahn's character complains of barracks conditions saying, "I wanted the army with the condos and private rooms! What? The army couldn't afford drapes? I'll be up at the crack of dawn here! I didn't sign up for this!" It was a classic case of violated expectations.

On the morning of July 21, 1861, 35,000 troops of the Union army faced off against 20,000 Confederate troops outside the town of Manassas Junction, Virginia. A small stream ran through the field known by the locals as Bull Run. It was to be the first land engagement between the two forces since the firing on Fort Sumter some 2 months earlier.

The northern public in Washington, D.C., just 25 miles north east, fully expected the battle to be brief and to bring the rebellion of the south to an early end. The depth of their misunderstanding was displayed by the presence of hundreds of spectators and news reporters from the nation's capital who brought picnic lunches and lined the surrounding hills to watch the "contest". One Union officer is on record as expecting the casualties to be so light that the blood shed would be able to be mopped up with a handkerchief.

By evening, 3,400 lay dead or wounded. The northern forces had been routed and the stunned, disorganized troops had frantically fled for the capital, right through the picnickers and reporters. This was not what they expected at all! They didn't sign up for this! Another classic case of violated expectations!

The problem was that both the public and the soldiers had romanticized the conflict. They had a "Private Benjamin" understanding. They all knew it would mean "war", but they had understood war in the abstract – as a concept. War as a concept is much different than a bloody soldier falling dead in your picnic basket!

Jesus doesn't want there to be any violated expectations; he is trying to prepare us for the same stripping away of the abstract as it applies to discipleship. In a time and culture like ours that wants to hold Christianity in general and discipleship in particular safely at arm's length, Jesus wants to bring it trampling over our picnic baskets. We want discipleship that consists of little more than wearing a pretty gold cross on a chain around our neck. Jesus wants us to understand that the cross is wood, not gold, and that we may be nailed to it, not wearing it!

Jesus himself has warned us previously that his message is offensive. And the discipleship that he presents us today has been wrenched from the abstract and thrown in our faces in particular. Discipleship means the real possibility of hating ones parents, hating ones children and siblings. It means hating one's own life to the point of death, even death on a cross. And it means the real possibility of renouncing, giving up, all that we have. And like the crowds on the hill and the soldiers on the line we realize that we don't want to do this! We don't want to sign up for this! We're counting the cost and it's just too expensive!

Our most common technique for dealing with these troubling, offensive words from Jesus is to spiritualize them. We can dismiss the gnawing uneasiness in our gut if we can convince ourselves that what Jesus really

meant was that we just need to be *willing* to do those things, that we have an *attitude* that would go to those extremes. We hasten to caveat Jesus' words with the disclaimer that he doesn't really expect us to actually give up all that we have; that would make us the very poor that he expects us to take care of with all our blessings! We love to claim we have the *attitude* of a disciple and are *willing* to do all those things...until, that is, some opportunity comes around that takes it out of the abstract and actually demands some action. When we suddenly discover that Christ Jesus actually meant what he said, we discover that our professed willingness to give up anything and our attitude to *die if we must* start to beat a hasty retreat. Content to try and get by with abstract concepts of willingness and attitudes of dying, our expectations are seriously violated. We discover that we don't really even want to be inconvenienced, much less impoverished. Like Private Benjamin, we complain about being moved out of our comfort zones, much less being crucified.

What's happening here is that we have taken Jesus' words as a prescription for discipleship. We have heard it as a challenge: that if you do these things, then you are a disciple. And we come to the honest realization that we're really not up to the challenge. We realize that by our own power and understanding we cannot do this.

But the kingdom of God is rarely an if/then proposition. Because the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the subject of all the verbs, it is a matter of because/therefore: Jesus is offering us a description of what may be *called for because* we are his disciples, not a prescription of what one must do in order to *become* one.

The Lord Jesus doesn't want there to be any expectations violated. In a world that is increasingly hostile to God's kingdom, Jesus wants to be clear about what his disciples will, sooner or later, encounter. This is not a checklist of what it takes to *become* a disciple. This is a description of the encounters for which Christ Jesus is preparing the disciples he is creating. Father will turn against their sons, mothers against their daughters. And it may end up costing us everything. Literally.

But even if the circumstances Jesus mentions are removed as benchmarks for *becoming* disciples, we're still left with the sinking feeling of how can we possibly fulfill that kind of discipleship? How can we live up to that kind of commitment? Answer – on our own, we can't! If becoming a disciple were left up to us – to our "free will", nobody would volunteer for a job description like that! But Jesus isn't looking for volunteers – he's building his church from the ground up. We confess in the Creed that we believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of the saints, the forgiveness

of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. And our Confessions remind us that it is the Holy Spirit who has been calling us through the gospel. It is the Holy Spirit of Christ Jesus that makes us holy and keeps us in the true faith. It is the Holy Spirit that continually draws us further up and further in, deeper and deeper into our baptism.

There are some who would like you to believe that the life we're given in holy baptism and into which the Lord Jesus calls us ever deeper is one of possessions, prosperity and success; that the only crosses we'll pick up are the gold ones from Jarrod's. But Jesus makes no such promise; his was wood and come from Herod's! The promise he does make is that when surrounded by hatred, amidst the loss of everything, with a cross like his in front of us, he will never leave or abandon his disciples. That's one expectation that will never be violated.

Thanks be to God.

Prayers of the Church

Let us pray in the name of Jesus to our heavenly Father for the Church, the world, and one another.

A brief silence

Gracious Father, teach us what true discipleship is. By your Spirit, give us the faith and steadfastness to bear its cost. Thank you for so clearly setting before us the "way of blessing and curse, of life and death." Thank you for the grace to choose the life you offer through the death and resurrection of your Son.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for the Church around the world. Make it holy and blameless, wise and loving, fearless and compassionate in equal measure. Make it delight in your Law and proclaim your Gospel. Establish its roots in the living waters flowing from Christ its head and its life.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for the people and ministries of this congregation. Help us to meditate on your Word day and night. Give us grace to forgive, faithfulness to serve, and joyfulness to worship. Use us to lead many people to those streams of living water in which is found true life in Christ.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for persecuted Christians, for missionaries, for seminary professors and students, and for all pastors and evangelists. Give them wise and humble hearts. Use them to bring the healing and saving Gospel to those whom the world has despised and rejected.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for our nation and its leaders, and for the people and leaders of every nation on earth. Help all of us to “walk not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stand in the way of sinners; nor sit in the seat of scoffers;” but instead to delight in your Law; to meditate on your will; and to practice doing it so that we may live before you in peace and righteousness.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Your Son dignified our labor by sharing our toil. Be with your people wherever they work. Make leaders of industries and commerce of this land responsive to your will. Give us pride in what we do. Be the strong refuge of those who suffer want and anxiety from lack of employment. Help all who are able to work to find suitable and fulfilling employment, and receive just payment for their labor.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for everyone who needs your mercy and loving-kindness – especially Pr. David Andreae, Curt Behrens, Amy Cooper, Mary Ann Helmricks, Claire Littlefield, Pr. James Puotyual, Jonathan Rabary, Delores Rodela, and the VansCoy family. Refresh their hearts; heal whatever is wounded; and restore them to fellowship with all who love them. As we recall Paul’s words to Philemon, we lift before you the plight of all who, even this day, are slaves. Deliver them from bondage, and let us always claim them as kindred for whom Christ has died.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy and loving Father, with gratitude and affection we entrust into your care our beloved dead. Through your Holy Spirit, strengthen us in our vocation as disciples of the Lord Jesus, so that, not counting the cost, we always bear faithful witness to him. For his sake, bring us into your presence, to be numbered with all those who serve, worship, and adore you in glory everlasting.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**