

Jesus minces no words:

Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

Count the cost: None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

Jesus calls us to lay it all down in faith.

Today we finish our message series on faith and next Sunday we begin a series called "Gifted in grace".

Faith is utter trust in God because God keeps his word.

Faith allows us to be content,

fearless,

and bold

because we know that God will never leave us or forsake us.

In Baptism, each of us has been claimed as a child of God and marked with the cross of Christ forever.

Within that relationship,

that security of our future in Christ's eternal presence,

We dare to live as holy people,

following Jesus,

doing the works of God in our everyday lives.

...

Today, Mother Teresa of Calcutta is being canonized as a saint in the church.

She is an example in our own time of someone who lived in faith –

- content to be poor,
- fearless in her work,
- and bold in her witness to the love of Jesus.

Her love for the very least of these brothers and sisters of her Lord Jesus was holy work –

- washing the feet of lepers,
- serving those living in slums,
- and caring for the poorest of the poor.

I recently read a story in Guideposts about a time Bob Macauley, founder of AmeriCares, was flying with Mother Teresa to Mexico City.

Their lunches came and to his surprise he heard Mother Teresa ask the flight attendant, “How much does this meal cost?”

The woman shrugged. “I don’t know. About a dollar in U.S. currency.”

“If I give it back to you,” Mother said, “would you give me that dollar to give to the poor?”

The flight attendant seemed startled.

She disappeared to consult with the pilot,

came back and said, “Yes, Mother, you may have the money for the poor.”

Naturally Bob felt he should give up his lunch too.

Soon the rest of the people on the plane did the same.

Mother Teresa now had \$129 to give to the poor.

But that was not enough.

Just as they were about to land she turned to Bob.

“Get me the food,” she said. “What is the airline going to do with 129 lunches?”

Hat in hand, Bob went over to some officials on the tarmac and explained, “Mother would like to have the lunches too.”

After some conferring the airline officials complied.

But she needed one more thing.

“Get me the truck,” she asked Bob. Huh? he wondered.

“I want the truck,” she repeated.

Bob soon found himself sitting in the passenger seat of a TACA Airlines truck with Mother Teresa behind the wheel.

She was so short she had to peer between the steering wheel and the dashboard to see.

She was a terrible driver but by God's grace she managed to get them to a poor neighborhood of cardboard shanties.

As they were handing out meals, Bob wondered how she had done it.

What could he learn about giving and asking? How would this help him at AmeriCares?

What could any of us learn about living boldly in faith?

Her answer: “It's easy to ask when you're doing it for the poor.”

Mother Teresa knew from experience what it is to give up everything to follow Jesus.

Not everyone is called by Jesus to serve the poor. But some of us are.

Some of us are called to raise children and grandchildren.

Some of us are called to be faithful as a husband or wife.

Some of us are called to be honest in business
or dedicated in our teaching.

Some of us are called to share the Gospel through music and others
through writing.

We have different vocations
– different ways that God is using us to build his kingdom here.

What is the same among us is
we are called by the same Lord Jesus
to lay everything down to follow him--

**Because he has already laid everything down to make it possible for
us to follow him.**

Jesus has given his life so that we might have the privilege and
opportunity to participate in God's saving work here on earth.

Think about that.

We are God's hands and feet in this world.

We are invited to live in faith and do what Jesus commands us
– not as slaves being forced,

but as God's holy people,
eager to be the instruments by which God's will is done on earth as
in heaven.

When we consider what our salvation cost our dear Lord, what is it for
us to lay everything down to serve him?

We have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

The unbelieving world will see it differently.

The world will say we are losing everything for nothing.

But the world rejects Jesus.

It cannot comprehend such love

as would die for the sake of the beloved.

It sees only itself

and seeks only to preserve itself at all costs.

But self-preservation ends in death.

Only in giving ourselves away do we truly live.

Faith looks away from the self to Jesus.

And Jesus leads us to those in need.

- People with material needs,
- with physical needs,
- with spiritual needs.

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When we gather for our Community Meals,
we are not only feeding people's bellies,
but we are also feeding their hunger for acceptance,
belonging, and companionship.

They are called Community Meals not just because of who is invited – the whole community
– but also because of what happens when we gather
– that we **form community** as we share the meal and our lives with one another.

Together, we become the community of those who trust in Jesus and lay it all down for him.

I'll grant you, it is often easier to say than to do.

The pull to self-serving preservation is strong.

But not stronger than God's grace.

When Jesus asks us to count the cost of following him,

he wants us to discern the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

He wants us to pay attention to where the Lord calls us to act for the sake of the kingdom.

He wants us to let go of our own agendas and be open to the opportunities God gives us to follow Jesus.

In counting the cost of discipleship, Jesus wants us to place our lives and all our goods and worldly pleasures on one side of the balance sheet

and the death and resurrection of Jesus on the other side.

Which would we rather have?

The little bit on our side of the ledger?

Or the abundant and eternal riches on Jesus' side?

...

This is a decision we make each day as we remember our Baptism
– as we remember that we are **already marked with Christ**

and claimed by the Holy Spirit.

...

There is much that might separate us from our goods

– but **nothing can separate us from God's good for us in Jesus.**

In faith, then, we can lay it all down to follow our Lord.

We can place all that God has given us in service to God's work here on earth.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.