

16th Sunday after Pentecost – Year C – September 12, 2010 - Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff,
KY

Based on Luke 14:25-33 - written by Pastor Paul Horn

The Cross is Necessary
I. For Christ
II. For you, the Christian

²⁵ Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: ²⁶ “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

²⁸ “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? ²⁹ For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, ³⁰ saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’

³¹ “Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? ³² If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. ³³ In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.

It’s been 9 years since the tragedy in New York. Across the country folks have different ways of remembering; Soldiers hold special formations on military posts, churches will invoke prayers, pastors will preach special sermons, a moment of silence on football fields across the country, others want to burn books. The pastor of that church in Florida seems to be receiving a lot attention, mostly opposition. Some of that opposition is warranted. While he does have the constitutional right to burn the Quran, he is putting our Soldiers at risk.

A comic in the newspaper this past week portrayed a crazed man holding a Quran over the flames and his t-shirt read, “What would Jesus burn?” The answer to that question is, “He wouldn’t.” He would have shared the gospel with Muslims, allowed the Holy Spirit to change hearts through the Word of God. We know that the Islamic faith does not include Jesus as the Savior of the world’s sin. It is our responsibility to share the truth in love. If we suffer for that then Jesus says that we’re blessed, not for burning books.

Today’s gospel appointed for 16th Sunday after Pentecost is from Luke 14. Jesus talks about carrying the cross. Having been brought to faith in Christ through baptism, we now follow after him. We are his disciples. Part of our discipleship is the cross. The cross does not cause us to be Jesus’ disciples, but the cross is a consequence of following Jesus.

Even if they’ve never read the Bible, most people talk about this idea of the cross of hardships and sufferings. Even famous musicians and rock bands from Billy Joel

to *Metallica* to *Staind* have sung about the “Cross to Bear.” The cross is not what most people think it is. It is not any and all suffering that is the natural lot of mankind as a result of the fall into sin. People suffer due to their own wickedness, disasters, famine, war, sickness, death. Suffering in and of itself is not cross bearing.

Christ describes the cross as something unique only to disciples of Christ. What is unique about this cross is that it is unique to me. **Anyone who does not carry his own cross cannot be my disciple**, notice that Jesus personalizes the cross. We cannot carry the cross of someone else. We are called to carry each others’ burdens, to mourn with those who mourn, but the cross is mine to carry. I cannot practice self denial for anyone else. So what is this cross?

Jesus explains - Vs26 **“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple.** I think the ears of our children and teenagers perked up. Hate mom and dad, brother and sister? I’m supposed to hate my own life and my spouse since I am Jesus’ disciple? What does he mean by that? Vs33, Jesus says that **unless you give up everything, you cannot be my disciple.** The cross is self-denial. I have to set aside my love of mom and dad, brother or sister, of my possessions, yes, even the love of my own life, and put my God first.

While illness, death, or suffering is not cross bearing, it may become cross bearing. A Soldier’s unit is set to deploy to combat, it might not be what that Soldier wishes, but God has his reasons, and that Soldier will submit to God’s will. That’s the cross he bears. A mother suffers a miscarriage, and cries out “Why did you take my baby?” Yet she submits her reason to God’s reason. That is the cross that Christian must bear.

This is why Christ calls it a cross, because it’s difficult and it’s heavy. It weighs heavy on our hearts and minds, because I wanted something different, a better outcome, an easier life, and I put that reasoning behind me, and humbly bow before God and accept his will, his desires, his wishes and I will love him above all things and trust him above my own reason, no matter what is currently happening in my life, even though it may seem insane and illogical to do so.

What makes the cross so difficult is that it’s a cross. Think about how shocking Jesus’ statement would have been to Jesus’ disciples and the large crowd that was following him. The cross was the instrument of death used by the state to threaten rebels, murderers, thieves, and traitors. That would be like saying, “Anyone who does not carry his own electric chair, or lethal injection kit or firing squad cannot be my disciples.” So shocking is this statement that later Peter takes Jesus aside, and says, “The cross is not fitting for the Son of God.”

That’s why the cross of self denial is such a heavy burden to carry. Just like Peter, your old self doesn’t want to hear that the cross of self denial is necessary. Because the old self is all about self. It is a love affair with yourself. I would much rather do what I want to do, rather than what God wants me to do. God wants me to just accept that he has a good purpose for taking the life of my loved one. I don’t want to carry that cross. God wants me to just trust that he is in control when we are remembering the events of an awful tragedy that he allowed to happen nine years ago? I don’t want to carry that cross. God wants me not to conform to this sinful generation, but there’s so many things that are gratifying and fun! He expects me to give up what I

want? That's not a cross I'm willing to carry. Life is easier without the cross of self denial. I don't want to drag this thing around all day... it's too hard to put God's will above my own!

Self denial so hard is because the old self is so close. Perhaps you've heard of pet lovers who keep wild animals as pets? Things inevitably go wrong. Can you imagine if a wild ape lived in your home, and it found your baseball bat in the garage? How do you control that situation? In the same way my sinful nature is so hard to control because it's always there, and always is happy to break God's will and to do whatever it wants.

Perhaps the hardest part of self denial is repentance. The sinful nature is unwilling even to consider that my lack of self denial is a sin, let alone confess that sin publicly in a worship service. The other side is that some Christians are so deeply saddened that they haven't been faithful in their cross bearing that they despair of their sins. They think of their sins as so great that not even God can forgive it, that not even Christ's cross can pay for them.

Christ also had to bear the cross of self denial. He too had to submit to the will of his Father. But Christ's cross is different from ours. He never had an evil force that lived within him that really wanted to sin as we do. And yet he still struggled. His cross was heavy. He was tempted by the opposition of his own people. Why bother going on if even they didn't believe in him? And did he ever perform a miracle that was for his ease or comfort? Not at all! But it would have been tempting to do so! In the garden asking his Father not my will, but yours be done. Oh, how easy it would have been to put a stop to the arrest, to the torture and the whipping, to stop the crucifixion, but he does not. He submits to the will of his Father. He takes the burden of the guilt of all humanity. Not an easy cross to bear, but he did it, and it amazes us, that he *never* sinned, was *always* obedient, *always* submitted to Father's will, *always* loved God with his whole heart, soul and mind. *Never* and *always* are words that cannot be used to describe our cross bearing.

Christ's cross bearing was unique because it was perfect in every way. He bore the cross at the end of his life, same way he started it; in total submission to his Father's will. And by that total self denial he accomplished what no other cross bearing could accomplish, the redemption of the world. Our cross is necessary, never accomplish or contribute to what Christ accomplished for us on the cross already. His cross was necessary to save us from our sins.

My parents have a picture in a photo album of me and my sister standing on top of the World Trade Center. Every time I look at that picture, I will be reminded of that awful day 9 years ago, and brought to the sobering reality that those towers are no longer standing. They've been destroyed.

Every time you and I look at the cross we are reminded of that awful event, but very necessary event, that took place there. Although the blood stained cross on Golgotha is no longer standing, what Jesus accomplished on the cross still stands for me today. The enormity of my sins, a burden I could never bear, was carried by Christ on that cross. And I am reminded of the forgiveness of all of my sins of faithless cross bearing every time I come to worship. For the sign of the cross is made by the pastor, the same sign was made over my head and heart at my baptism, and I am reminded that my sins were washed away. When I am about to leave the

Lord's Table, the sign of the cross reminds me that Christ's sacrifice of body and blood were for the forgiveness of my sins. Every time I leave the house of God, I leave with his blessing and the sign of cross, a reminder that God does bless me and keep me, that his face shines on me and is gracious to me because of the cross. Because of Christ's cross I am his disciple and I carry my own cross.

As crazy as it sounds, my new self rejoices in my cross! I actually pray, "Thank you Jesus for my cross!" The cross is a joy because it makes me run back to Christ daily, to daily set aside my will, my reason, my doubts, fears, to put to death this love affair with myself, and to begin the love affair with my God and Savior Jesus, to submit to his will. Having heard the absolution of sins forgiven, you will go home refreshed and with a renewed embrace of your cross. We want to express our joy in what Christ has done for us and we will do so in self denial. When we grieve the death of a loved one, when illness, financial woes, job loss, deployment, broken relationships come, we will set aside our reason and submit to God's reasoning, even though we may not understand it. But we will cheerfully take up our cross and follow him wherever he leads us. For at the end of our journey, he will lead us to a place where the cross will be removed, where in heaven we will have a perfect will and perfect obedience. There we will rejoice forever in his victory by the cross. May the Holy Spirit make us faithful cross bearers until that time. Amen.