

Deuteronomy 6:1-9

Luke 14:25-35

July 31, 2016

Preached by Philip Gladden at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace, NC

**On the Road with Jesus
AT THE CROSSROADS**

Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

I once read about a love letter that a young man wrote to his sweetheart. In it he expressed his undying love for and devotion to her. The letter went like this:

Dear Sue, I am writing you to express my complete and undying love for you. You are the passion of my life. There is nothing in this world that can keep me from loving you and being by your side at all times. I would climb the world's tallest mountain to be with you. I would swim a raging river to be with you. I would cross the largest desert to be with you. I will always love you and will always be devoted to you. Yours forever. Bill.

P.S. I'll come around to see you on Saturday unless it's raining.

When a person makes a public profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, is baptized, and becomes a member of the church, the body of Christ, he or she is asked the following questions:

Do you desire to be baptized?

Trusting in the gracious mercy of God, do you turn from the ways of sin and renounce evil and its power in the world?

Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Lord and Savior, trusting in his grace and love?

Will you be Christ's faithful disciple, obeying his Word and showing his love?

Will you be a faithful member of this congregation, share in its worship and ministry through your prayers and gifts, your study and service, and so fulfill your calling to be a disciple of Jesus Christ?

Our confession of faith in Jesus Christ, our vow to be his disciple, is something like our love letter to our Savior. It might read something like this:

Dear Jesus, In my confession of faith, I express my complete and undying love for you. You are the passion of my life. There is nothing in this world that can keep me from loving you and being by your side at all times. I accept you as my Lord and Savior. I trust in your grace and love. I will be your faithful disciple. I will obey your Word and show your love. I will be a faithful member of your church. I will share in its worship and ministry through my prayers and gifts, my study and service. Your disciple, Phil

How often do we add a P.S. to our confession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and our vow to be his disciple?

P.S. I will be your faithful disciple, unless it interferes with what I've already got planned.

P.S. I will be your faithful disciple, unless I think you demand too much of me.

P.S. I will be your faithful disciple, unless something better comes along that captures my attention and energy.

P.S. I will be your faithful disciple, unless following you leads me out of my comfort zone.

P.S. I will be your faithful disciple, unless things don't always go my way in the church.

P.S. I will be your faithful disciple, unless I forget that you died for me so that I can live for you.

P.S. I will be your faithful disciple, but don't expect me to put you at the top of my list of loyalties.

What P.S.'s might we add to our **church's** discipleship/love letter to Jesus?

P.S. We will be your faithful disciples, if you don't call us to leave our comfort zone as a church.

P.S. We will be your faithful disciples, if you don't challenge us to take any risks for our faith and witness here in Wallace.

P.S. We will be your faithful disciples, if you let us pick and choose when, where, and how we're going to follow you.

P.S. We will be your faithful disciples, if you just won't make too many demands on our time, our money, or our energy.

P.S. We will be your faithful disciples, if you won't challenge the status quo here in our community.

P.S. We will be your faithful disciples, if you won't expect us to put you above all of the things we so highly value in our lives.

St. Ignatius of Loyola lived in the 16th century. He was a Spanish knight from a noble family. He later became a hermit, then a priest who founded the Society of Jesus. He authored a prayer for generosity which may be familiar to some of you, which goes like this: *Eternal Word, only begotten Son of God, teach me true generosity. Teach me to serve you as you deserve. To give without counting the cost, to fight heedless of wounds, to labor without seeking rest, to sacrifice myself without thought of any reward save the knowledge that I have done your will. Amen.*¹

Another prayer that cites the example of St. Ignatius sounds similar to his prayer: *Almighty God, from whom all good things come: You called Ignatius of Loyola to the service of your Divine Majesty and to find you in all things. Inspired by his example and strengthened by his companionship, may we labor without counting the cost and seek no reward other than knowing that we do your will; through Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever. Amen.*²

Both prayers ask God to help us “give without counting the cost” and to “labor without counting the cost.” The prayers ask God for help in being generous and self-giving to others in the name of Jesus. But it’s interesting to offer those prayers in light of what Jesus had to say to the large crowds traveling with him. In a nutshell, he told them, “Before you follow me, you had better count the cost!” Actually, he told them that in words that are still hard to hear and understand:

* “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, is not able to be my disciple.”

* “Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me is not able to be my disciple.”

* “Which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he had enough to complete it?”

* “What king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able to do it?”

* “None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.”

John Pierpoint Morgan (J.P.) was one of America’s wealthiest people in the late 19th century. He formed General Electric and U.S. Steel and is credited with saving the U.S. economy on at least two occasions. Morgan reportedly once said, “If you have to ask, you can’t afford it.” There are two versions of the story. One has Morgan responding to a reporter who asked him how much it cost to operate his yacht. The other story has Morgan advising banker Henry Clay Pierce not to buy a yacht.³

“If you have to ask, you can’t afford it.” But Jesus says, “If you want to follow me and be my disciple, you’d better ask how much it’s going to cost, to see if you’re willing and able to pay the cost.” What Jesus says to the large crowds traveling with him sounds a lot like what he said to those other would-be followers who were going along the road with him: “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head . . . Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God . . . No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:57-62)

That’s the thing — Jesus wants all of us! And, if and when we give ourselves over to him, everything else — all of our other loyalties in life — are seen from the perspective of being a disciple of Jesus Christ. But, oh, how we resist that total claim upon our lives.

In his book, *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis writes about Christ’s total claim on our lives, even if that’s not exactly what we have in mind. He writes, “When I was a child I often had a toothache, and I knew that if I went to my mother she would give me something which would deaden the pain for that night and let me get to sleep. But I did not go to my mother — at least, not till the pain became very bad. And the reason I did not go was this. I did not doubt she would give me the aspirin; but I knew she would also do something else.

“I knew she would take me to the dentist the next morning. I could not get what I wanted out of her without getting something more, which I did not want. I wanted

immediate relief from pain: but I could not get it without having my teeth set permanently right. And I knew those dentists; I knew they started fiddling about with all sorts of other teeth which had not yet begun to ache. They would not let sleeping dogs lie; if you gave them an inch they took a [mile] (*sic*).

“Now, if I may put it that way, Our Lord is like the dentists. If you give Him an inch, He will take a [mile] (*sic*). Dozens of people go to Him to be cured of some one particular sin which they are ashamed of . . . or which is obviously spoiling daily life . . . Well, He will cure it all right: but He will not stop there. That may be all you asked; but if once you call Him, in, He will give you the full treatment. That is why He warned people to ‘count the cost’ before becoming Christians.”⁴

Have you heard the story about the chicken and the pig who were talking in the barnyard early one morning? As they were talking, they saw Farmer Brown come out of the farmhouse and start walking toward them with an intent look on his face. The chicken looked at the pig and noticed that he was very nervous. “What’s wrong with you?” asked the chicken. “Here comes Farmer Brown,” said the pig, “he’s coming to get his breakfast. You know how much he loves his ham and eggs.” “So what?” asked the chicken. “That’s easy for you to say,” squealed the pig. “For you, it’s just an inconvenience. For me, it’s a total commitment!”

What do **you** make of Jesus’ call to be his disciple? There is little doubt that his call means a “total commitment” to him. What does that mean for your life? Discipleship might well involve “doing” lots of things. But more important than that, discipleship means being open to what God has in store for us in Jesus Christ and trusting that God will provide what we need for the task to which we have been called. Jesus says that being his disciple is something that we must enter into with our eyes wide open — “Think about what you’re doing and decide if you’re willing to stay with me all the way.”

We have come to the end of our summer journey on the road with Jesus and we find ourselves at a crossroads. Jesus’ journey continues on to Jerusalem and he calls out to us, “Follow me.” Today and every day we must decide if we’re willing and able to do just that.

Several times I have been asked by folks in this church, “What is our church’s passion?” That’s a good question. How would you answer that question? What **is** our church’s passion?

If we pay attention to the Great Commandment and to what our Lord Jesus tells us along the way, our passion should be God himself, who has shown us how much he loves us in Jesus Christ and what he expects of us as his followers. We need to let that passion for God, for God’s Son, and for God’s ways shape our Christian lives and our congregation. Maybe, just maybe, then we won’t be so quick to add a P.S. to our love letter to God, unless it’s to say, “P.S. We will be your faithful disciples, and we will love you with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our might.”

Let us pray: Eternal God, teach us to commit our lives to your care, and to trust in the knowledge of your love and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

NOTES

¹ www.disciples.org/generalboard/the-prayer-wall

² www.lectionarypage.net/LesserFF/Jul/Ignatius.html

³ [www.sloperama](http://www.sloperama.com), “Lesson #30: If You Have to Ask” and “Entry from June 30, 2009” at www.barrypopik.com, respectively.

⁴Derek Rishmawy, “C.S. Lewis on ‘Counting the Cost,’ at www.derekrishmawy.com.