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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
July 26, 2015  
9<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Exodus 3:1-14, Acts 16:11-15

Hymns: 231; 421; 399; 759:1,3 (798:1,2,4)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Mark 8:34-38

34 When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 35 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. 36 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? 37 Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? 38 For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

(NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Christian versus Disciple

Most people really don't get it. Americans use the word "Christian" for just about anybody. People really don't know what it means. If someone is nice to other people, many people would consider that person a Christian. It doesn't matter what that

individual believes or doesn't believe about Jesus, or anything else for that matter. (By the way, if you say someone else is sinning, that's not nice. You aren't really a Christian.) If you are **nice** then you must be a Christian. Well, of course unless you're Muslim or Hindu, or Buddhist. So many think of the Dali Lama as a saint even if he is Buddhist, and many assume he must be going to heaven too along with all the other nice people on earth. It's almost like you might just as well think of him as being a Christian. Even if someone chooses to follow a different one of the great spiritual leaders of the world what does it really matter? Many falsely conclude that does it really matter if one is a disciple of Mohammed, or Buddha, or Jesus, or Moses? Many suggest that all these religions present a legitimate avenue for one to follow that one might reach heaven or Nirvana, or Utopia, or whatever comes after this life. This is the state of much of the spirituality in American.

This characterization of American spirituality is substantiated by simply watching a public ecumenical religious observance. Since we are a Christian country almost every major religion will be represented from Native American shamans, to Muslim imams, to Jewish rabbis, to Catholic priests and Protestant pastors. It's the Christian thing to do! Isn't it? Is it? Really?!

You see what I mean? There is a whole lot of confusion about what it means to be a Christian. Christians during Jesus' ministry were simply called disciples. There were many more disciples than the twelve. A disciple is a follower, and in a very careful and diligent way, like a student, a good student who really pays attention.

On the day when Jesus spoke the words of our text a lot of things had been going on between Him and the twelve disciples. He had asked them whom the people thought He was. He then asked whom the disciples thought Jesus was. Peter had answered, "The Christ." Jesus explained what it meant that He was the Christ in terms of His sufferings and death which were soon to come to pass. Peter took exception to that, strong exception. Jesus, even more forcefully made it clear that this was exactly what He was all about. Peter needed to understand that, and so do we all if we are to understand:

## **THEME: The Meaning of Discipleship.**

**Mark 8:34** When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

We begin with Jesus’ instruction to –

### **I. Deny Oneself.**

This lesson about discipleship was one the twelve disciples needed, but it was also a lesson that the rest of the people also needed. Discipleship isn’t simply saying that Jesus is something special, and maybe, when it’s convenient, one might show up to listen, or when one has a special pressing need then by all needs one will search out Jesus to have him address this temporal problem. Then, once the day was over, it’s back to “normal” life. Following Jesus involves much more than that. Jesus starts with the idea self-denial. “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself.”

What does that mean? In our world nothing seems as important as being *true* to oneself. You are who you are, and you should own it, and even celebrate it! All kinds of sin and evil desires are protected by that umbrella. You want to live together without being married? If that’s what you want then do it! Don’t deny yourself! You have other passions and sinful desires? Then by all means don’t say “no.” The world emphatically encourages people to not repress that which is evil. In doing so you are a hero, and may even receive a reward for your courage to “*come out*” and reveal the real you! Whatever you want, whatever you desire for your life, *own* it!

But wait! Jesus said, if you desire to follow Him, then **deny** yourself. Say “**NO!**” to that which is evil. Say “**No**” to that which is corrupt. Follow Jesus and **sacrifice self**; sacrifice self for others, sacrifice self and live to the glory of God according to God’s Holy will.

It goes beyond simply not following our carnal desires. Denying ourselves includes recognizing our sin, and rejecting any ideas of *self-righteousness*. We live trusting Jesus, not only for daily bread, and deliverance from tribulation in this life, but for *righteousness*,

and *life*. **Jesus** is my righteousness. He alone atoned for my sins. Any suffering that I might experience in this life has no redemptive value. It only reveals how this world and this life has been corrupted by sin and death. It directs us to Jesus as our hope for life everlasting. However, as I trust in Jesus I will also appreciate the extent of His love that is evident in His sufferings. I realize that Jesus is telling me that being His disciple will also mean that one --

## **II. Take Up One's Cross.**

Taking up one's cross has become a pretty general reference to any and all sufferings that we may endure in this life. It's really something more specific than that. It's the burden that comes because we follow Jesus. The world hated Jesus. Actually still does, in spite of a lot of rhetoric to the opposite. Just listen to how scientists and those who are politically correct condemn those who are faithful to the Jesus' Word. So life may not always go the way we would like simply because we continue to follow Jesus. From time to time it becomes clear that life would be easier and more successful, if we would just go with the flow, keep our mouths shut, hide in the crowd. After all who's going to know? Well, Jesus will, that's who! Jesus said:

**Mark 8:35-37** For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. 36 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? 37 Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

If your life becomes all about saving this life, and making this life just the way the world has described the perfect life, and one expends all one's time and energy to that end, well one may very well lose his or her life. Lose not just this passing thing we call life on earth, but **LIFE**, life with **God**, **EVERLASTING** life.

Following Jesus may indeed mean that we won't achieve some of our goals and ambitions. That is up to the Lord, and how He decides to bless our gifts and our labors for our spiritual and eternal good. But if we follow Jesus we will step on some toes, and we might find ourselves missing out on a contract, being passed over for a promotion, or even losing a job. Enduring these things for Jesus, with joy in hearts to the Lord; that is taking up one's cross.

So what if you could win the lottery? What if you could be as rich as Donald Trump or Bill Gates? Would it be worth it if it cost you your soul? What if you had all that the world could offer and you obtained that wealth in a manner that was less than God blessed? Would you even be willing to exchange all that wealth for your soul? Would all that wealth be enough to ransom your soul?

The only way to life, and the riches which are stored up for us in heaven is to –

### **III. Follow Jesus.**

Jesus secured life for me by His death upon the cross and His resurrection from the dead. In Him alone I have assurance of life in heaven, and He promises me more than I could ever know in this life.

**TLH 430:8** “What is the world to me! My Jesus is my Treasure, my Life, my Health, my Wealth, my Friend, my Love, my Pleasure, my Joy, my Crown, my All, my Bliss eternally. Once more than I declare, What is the world to me!”

What does it involve this following Jesus? With its connection to the taking up of one’s cross we realize that it includes being on the receiving end of the mockery or persecution of the world. We suffer with Him even as He suffered for us. But it includes more than this.

True discipleship includes following Jesus in His teaching. We know that Jesus is the Word made flesh. We know that all Holy Scripture directs us to Jesus, and reveals the truth about Jesus, and leads us in paths of righteousness. We know that He is the true wisdom from on high.

We also know that the world, as well as many within the visible church, have decided that the Word of the Lord, including also the record of what Jesus taught and did, need to be de-mythologized. They suggest that we are not to take the Word including that record of Jesus’ miracles, Jesus’ suffering, death, and especially Jesus’ resurrection as being literally true. It is rather a story intended to

incite us to love others, and search for truth within ourselves, and to join the struggle against social, political and economic injustice in the world.

The world can be so bold, so crass, so intolerant in the declaration of their tolerance for all, (except confession Christianity) that we may find ourselves intimidated into silence. In some parts of the world Christians are in prison for the sake of Christ. In other parts of the world it can be life threatening. For us it is usually only name calling. Persecution may become more severe. Will that increase our shame, for we need to know that when the world succeeds in silencing us, in getting us to hide our faith, we are ashamed of Jesus. Jesus said in our text:

**Mark 8:38** “Whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”

We ought to be bold and unashamed about His truth. If we are ashamed of Him and this Gospel of a crucified and risen Savior, than He also will be ashamed of us when He comes in His glory. Jesus also spoke of the nature of true discipleship in plain enough language for anyone to understand. It is about His teaching of the only truth that saves.

**John 8:31-32** “Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. 32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’”

Follow Jesus by continuing in His Word, and knowing that His Word is true. We can be confident that every Word of God is true and profitable for doctrine and for instruction in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16).

Follow Jesus and you will know the way of life everlasting, for Jesus teaches us of the forgiving grace of God. Jesus satisfied God’s wrath once and for all when He gave Himself for us upon the cross. Jesus declared, “It is finished,” and the devil was defeated in his evil plot to bring us all down with him into the pit of eternal death. Jesus was buried so that He might show us the

reality of resurrection, and that we might have the hope of life. This is the reality that is ours when we follow Jesus. This is the blessing of being Jesus' disciples. This is what it means to be a Christian!

**AMEN.**

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.