

19 September 2004
Pentecost 16

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Out with the Old; In with the New”

Text: Luke 14:25-33

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Some time ago, a theologian by the name of Richard Niebuhr offered a scathing critique of modern-day religion. He said that nowadays, religion means “*A God without wrath [bringing] men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.*” People just want to feel good and to feel good about themselves. But while this may be the broad, easy way of modern-day spirituality, it is most certainly not the way of Jesus. There is no watering down on His part. No soft-pedaling the truth. As we heard from Him this morning, either give it all up for Him – family, possessions, and life – or you cannot be His disciple.

I don’t think I need to tell you that that is not a welcome message in our day and age. Because we have become caught up in the “tyranny of the easy.” Or in other words, if it’s not easy, I don’t want to do it. If it takes too much effort, it is not worth my time. Faster, easier, more streamlined are the mantras of today. And so we have microwave meals, and books like “Computers for Dummies.” Getting up to change the channel on the TV is unheard of! And if we can’t go into Iraq, throw out Saddam Hussein, establish a new government, and get out in a year, we shouldn’t have done it. Quick and easy is good; long and hard is bad. . . . It is so in churches too. It took those in the early church *three years* before they could become members of the church; nowadays, in many churches, its 4 weeks – if *that* long. The liturgy is too hard, so we’ll jettison it in favor of something easier. Praise songs are easier than hymns. You can even have your Sunday offering automatically withdrawn from your bank account! . . . It’s got to be easy.

And so has it also become with discipleship? Simply come to communion once a year, or attend at Christmas and Easter, and you’re a member in good standing. Don’t demand too much. Be a Christian on Sundays – it doesn’t have to effect the other six and a half days of the week! If we build it, they might come. If we make it easy, they will join. . . . But the world can see through this shallowness and hollowness. It is a message lacking substance. They know that easy doesn’t mean better, it just means easy, and caters to our laziness. And again, it was most certainly not the message of Jesus. In fact, He said

exactly the opposite. If you're looking for easy, don't bother. Either give it all up, or you cannot be His disciple.

Three times Jesus said that in the Holy Gospel today – in case you missed it the first two times. He means it. Being a Christian is not easy. Family, possessions and life are important to us, and we do put them before the Lord. We do. Because it's easier to do so. Besides, God will understand. He'll forgive me.

That is true, as far as it goes. You are forgiven – for this, and much, much more. God's grace is the only reason we are here today, and that we are the disciples that we are. On our own, we cannot do it. On our own, we cannot meet the demands or standards Jesus sets here for discipleship. But "*the Holy Spirit has called you by the Gospel, enlightened you with His gifts, sanctified and kept you in the true faith. . . . He daily and richly forgives you all your sins.*" (Small Catechism, Explanation to the Third Article of the Creed) And that's why you are here today. Because the Holy Spirit has called you and brought you here, to receive the forgiveness your Saviour won for you on the cross. Jesus was the perfect disciple, the perfect follower of God's will and Law, and laid down His life in place of all of us who do not meet the standard. We fail, but the Son of God took the stripes, the nails, the humiliation, and the rejection of us sinful servants, so we wouldn't have to face it. And He wanted to. He wanted to do it because He is in love with you, and His love compelled Him to save you. To make you His own. To rescue you from this sinful world and way of life, and give you a new life. And this He has done. His death, resurrection, and ascension has accomplished it, and in the water and Word of Holy Baptism He has given it to you. All of it. Freely and completely and abundantly. You are forgiven, and we are disciples, because our Saviour gave it all up for us.

So is that it then? We can't, we're forgiven, repeat? Well no. Your Saviour wants more for you than that. He wants to give you more than that; to give you more life than that. Being a Christian, Jesus says, is more than just living the same old life with a new label – it is living a new life. The new life that we have been given in Holy Baptism, and the new life restored in us as we continue to receive Jesus' forgiveness. And what that life looks like is what Jesus is telling us today. It is a life that gives all up for Him. That gives up the old, because the new has come. But the old is given up not *in order to gain* the new! No, we give up the old *because we have been given* the new.

And so we can give up our possessions, because we have been given a kingdom. The child of the king doesn't need to horde things for himself – it is already all his! And Jesus has made us children of the King of the Universe!

And so also can we give up our lives, because we have been given a new life. If I have

been given a new 2005 Mercedes, I'm not going to continue to drive around my 1992 Ford Taurus! And Jesus has given us a new life in Holy Baptism.

And then also we do not put our family ahead of God, because in Christ we have been given a new family. A new family that includes the prophets, and apostles, and martyrs, and all the saints who have gone on before us. A new family bound together by the blood of Christ. A new family that continues to grow and which will never leave us alone, or move away, because it is wherever the Church is.

We can give all of those things up because we have been given much more than we could ever give up. And when we hold back and refuse to give up the old, we are not thereby enriching ourselves – we are only depriving God of giving abundantly, and depriving ourselves of receiving much more than we could ever ask or imagine. (Eph 3:20) For in giving of yourself for Christ, you have really given up nothing, for Christ is everything.

Now this is a mindset very different from that of the world – a world caught up in the “tyranny of the easy,” because this is most certainly not easy! It is most difficult, **because it takes faith.** Our riches are real, but they may not be earthly. Our new life is real and eternal, but we still live in a world and body of sin. And so giving up the old, what we know, what we can see and hold onto, is hard. Giving up the old means facing our sin and wrestling with it, when it is much easier to accept our sin and make peace with it. Giving up the old means giving up control and leaving your life in God's hands. Which is better anyway, but hard to do. But realize this: we do not know what life will bring; what will happen tomorrow, or next week, or next year. But we do know what Christ brings – His forgiveness, His kingdom, and new life. So which is it actually more of a risk holding onto?

Jesus does not demand that you be His disciple. And there's no “bait and switch” either! He doesn't promise a perfect, easy life if you do! In this era of reality TV shows, Jesus gives you the reality. And reality's hard. We'd like to live in our fantasy worlds, but Jesus calls us to give up the old and live the life He has given us, the new life, the life of discipleship here in this very real and sinful world. Here where He has, in His wisdom, placed us. Here, that through you, He might call others to Himself. . . . And He has promised to be with you. And so He has given you His Holy Spirit, and He Himself is here for you in His Supper. Really and truly here, body and blood, just as real as He was to the crowds following Him that day. But He is here not just to buck you up, give you a pat on the back, and send you back out! No, He is here to feed you. Take eat; take drink. A new testament; forgiveness of sins; resurrection; a new life. Its all here for you. New food for a new life.

So come, repent, receive. The cost of discipleship is great, but it *has* been paid for you in full. So quit trying to pay it yourself! Come, repent, receive. For it is in this that you are following your Saviour, right to where He wants you to be.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.