

The Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity YEAR C September 8, 2013

The essential message of this week's readings boils down to two things: 1) We are constantly faced with the choice to do the right thing or not; 2) Doing the right thing (or following Jesus, if you will) is very costly. Unfortunately, in our world, expediency, short-term thinking and prosperity preaching have all made the Gospel of counting the cost very unpopular. But, in truth, life is not found in quick fixes, or in pandering to our appetites – we know this. Life is found in following Christ's sacrificial, life-giving ways – which is what it means, really, to do the right thing.

May our worship lead us to count the cost, and choose to be people who always seek to do the right thing.

INTRODUCTIONS

For use by lectors, in order of service, parish bulletins and magazines

Jeremiah 18:1-11: Jeremiah is instructed to observe the potter at work, and God explains how God works – how good that is promised may not happen if a nation turns to evil, and bad that is prophesied may not happen if the nation repents and turns back to God. Then God's people are called to turn back to God.

OR **Deuteronomy 30:15-20**: The people are offered the choice of life or death. Life is to love God and live according to God's principles. Death is to turn away from God and to worship other gods.

Psalms 139:1-6, 13-18: A song of celebration for how intimately and completely God knows us – God formed us before we were born, and knows the path God wanted us to follow.

OR **Psalms 1**: Those who devote themselves to God's law and God's ways are blessed, secure and prosperous, while those who are wicked will fade away like husks blown away by the wind.

Philemon 1-21: Paul writes to Philemon asking him to "do the right thing" and accept Onesimus, his run away slave, back as a brother in Christ, without judgement or punishment.

Luke 14:25-33: The cost of following Christ is everything, and Jesus encourages us to count the cost before committing ourselves to him.

COLLECTS OF THE DAY

Collect One

Keep, we beseech thee,
O Lord, thy Church with thy perpetual mercy;
and, because the frailty of man without thee cannot but fall,
keep us ever by thy help from all things hurtful,
and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Collect Two

God,
who in generous mercy sent the Holy Spirit

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upon your Church in the burning fire of your love:
Grant that your people may be fervent
in the fellowship of the gospel;
that, always abiding in you,
they may be found steadfast in faith and active in service;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Heavenly Father, you remind us to consider humility as a virtue. Help us live our lives in the shadow of Christ our Lord, who was humble, even to death on the cross.
Loving Christ: **Help us share the faith.**

Holy Spirit, keeps us from repeating the mistakes of our ancestors who forsook you, even after you led them through the wilderness.
Loving Christ: **Help us share the faith.**

Holy Spirit, we thank you for the witness of ancestors who gave freely to the poor, while their selfish neighbours lived only for themselves. Honour us with opportunities to be generous.
Loving Christ: **Help us share the faith.**

Lord Jesus Christ, shape our lives with your love.
Loving Christ: **Help us share the faith.**

Lord Jesus Christ, you make us imagine the poor sitting at our supper tables with the rest of our family, for all of us are children of God. Give us courage to move beyond imagination to real fellowship with those in need.
Loving Christ: **Help us share the faith.**

Hear us as we name those among us in need of your special attention and loving care
_____.
Loving Christ: **Help us share the faith.**

Listening God, hear our prayers. **Amen**

POST COMMUNION

Eternal God,
we have received these tokens of your promise.
May we who have been nourished with holy things
live as faithful heirs of your promised kingdom.
We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

PRAYERS

God of power and justice,
like Jeremiah you weep over those
who wander from you,
turn aside to other gods,
and enter into chaos and destruction.

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By your tears and through your mercy,
teach us your ways
and write them on our hearts
so that we may follow faithfully
the path you show us. Amen.

You are the great God — he who is in heaven. You are the creator of life, you make the regions above. You are the hunter who hunts for souls. You are the leader who goes before us. You are he whose hands are with wounds. You are he whose feet are with wounds. You are he whose blood is a trickling stream, You are he whose blood was spilled for us. *Prayer of a Xhosa Christian from Africa*

O thou, from whom to be turned is to fall, to whom to be turned is to rise, and in whom to stand is to abide for ever; Grant us in all our duties thy help, in all our perplexities thy guidance, In all our dangers thy protection, And in all our sorrows thy peace; Through Jesus Christ our Lord. *St. Augustine (340—430)*

Father, I am seeking: I am hesitant and uncertain, but will you, O God, watch over each step of mine and guide me. *St. Augustine (354-430)*

Blessed are you, creator of all, to you be praise and glory for ever. As your dawn renews the face of the earth bringing light and life to all creation, may we wake refreshed from the depths of sleep, open our eyes to behold your presence and strengthen our hands to do your will, that the world may rejoice and give you praise. Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Blessed be God forever. *(After Lancelot Andrewes, 1626. Common Worship)*

Saviour God, humanity longs to live in peace. We pray for your healing peace; for those racked by guilt or regret, for those caught up in turbulent relationships, for those burdened by illness or sorrow. Humanity longs to live in peace, but not peace at any price. We pray for those who stir up dissension; by questioning the ways of society, by being open and honest, and by searching for the truth. Amen

Spirit of God, your church longs to live in peace. We pray for your healing peace; between denominations, within individual churches, in our own hearts. Your church longs to live in peace, but not peace at any price. We pray for those who stir up dissension; disturbing us with new visions and ideas, criticising our apathy and complacency, and provoking us to think afresh about our calling. Amen *From Companion to the Revised Common Lectionary, Intercessions, Christine Odell*

God, who from old, taught the hearts of your faithful people by sending to them the light of you Holy Spirit: grant to us by the same spirit to have a right judgment in all things and to evermore rejoice in his holy comfort. Amen.

Heavenly Father, help us to live this day and each day, as if it were our last. Amen

God our Father, be near to our children growing up in the peril and confusion of these times. Guard them from the forces of evil at work in our society, and lead them in the paths of goodness and truth; enable us as parents, grandparents, family members or as friends to give them at all times the security of our love and the help of our example and our prayers. Amen (Edward Peck)

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Increase your grace in us, O Lord, that we may fear your Name beyond which nothing is more holy; that we may love you, beyond whom nothing is more loveable; that we may glorify you beyond whom nothing is more worthy of praise, and that we may long for you beyond whom nothing is more desirable; and grant that thus fearing, loving, glorifying and longing we may see you, face to face; through Christ our Lord. Amen Desiderius Erasmus, 1466-1536

Friends in Christ,
God invites us to hold the needs of our sisters and brothers
as dear to us as our own needs.
Loving our neighbors as ourselves,
we offer our thanksgivings and our petitions
on behalf of the church and the world.
Hear our prayers, God of power,
and through the ministry of your Son
free us from the grip of the tomb,
that we may desire you as the fullness of life
and proclaim your saving deeds to all the world. Amen.

As you heard the prayer of Isaac and Rebekah, O God,
and guided them in the way of your love,
so listen now to those who call upon you.
Move us to praise your gracious will,
for in Christ Jesus you have saved us from the deeds of death
and opened for us the hidden ways of your love.
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Lord God, friend of those in need,
your Son Jesus has untied our burdens
and healed our spirits.
We lift up the prayers of our hearts for those still burdened,
those seeking healing,
those in need within the church and the world.
Hear our prayers
that we may love you with our whole being
and willingly share the concerns of our neighbors. Amen.

Creator God,
you call us to love and serve you
with body, mind, and spirit
through loving your creation
and our sisters and brothers.
Open our hearts in compassion
and receive these petitions
on behalf of the needs of the church and the world.
Holy One,
hear our prayers and make us faithful stewards
of the fragile bounty of this earth
so that we may be entrusted with the riches of heaven. Amen.

We praise your abiding guidance, O God,
for you sent us Jesus, our Teacher and Messiah,

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to model for us the way of love for the whole universe.
We offer these prayers of love
on behalf of ourselves and our neighbours,
on behalf of your creation and our fellow creatures.
Loving God,
open our ears to hear your word
and draw us closer to you,
that the whole world may be one with you
as you are one with us in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

God of mercy and healing,
you who hear the cries of those in need,
receive these petitions of your people
that all who are troubled
may know peace, comfort, and courage.
Life-giving God,
heal our lives,
that we may acknowledge your wonderful deeds
and offer you thanks from generation to generation
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

God of salvation,
who sent your Son to seek out and save what is lost,
hear our prayers
on behalf of those who are lost in our day,
receiving these petitions and thanksgivings
with your unending compassion.
Redeeming Sustainer,
visit your people
and pour out your strength and courage upon us,
that we may hurry to make you welcome
not only in our concern for others,
but by serving them
generously and faithfully in your name. Amen.

Creator God,
you form us on the wheel of life
as a potter molds the clay.
Shape us into holy vessels,
bearing the mark of your wise crafting,
that we may remain strong and useful through years of faithful and obedient service
in Christ's name. Amen.

Source of life and blessing,
of garden, orchard, field,
root us in obedience to you
and nourish us by your ever-flowing Spirit,
that, perceiving only the good we might do,
our lives may be fruitful,
our labor productive,
and our service useful,
in communion with Jesus, our brother. Amen.

LECTIONARY NOTES

REFLECTIONS ON THEME:

The Lectionary seems to bring us back to this one question over and over – Will we choose life and good and God, or death and evil and “not-God”? – for us to think about it from a different perspective and explore it at a deeper level. A basic reality of life and faith is this question, and the way we answer it will determine how we live, and the consequences we must face (Jeremiah, Deuteronomy and Psalm 1). Choosing life does not guarantee health, wealth and happiness – no matter what the prosperity preachers tell us. Faith is not a protection from life’s struggles and suffering. Rather, the gift of choosing God’s life is the wisdom, the resources and the capacity to give of self that leads us into fullness of life, and into knowing the reality of God’s reign in our daily lives – no matter what we may have to deal with. The big challenge in this week’s readings is the recognition that following God’s way is difficult and costly (Luke). Doing the right thing, while it leads us into God’s abundant life, is often counter-intuitive, and goes against our natural inclinations and reactions (Philemon). But we have the assurance that God knows us, loves and seeks the best for us (Psalm 139). If we are to find the courage to pay the price of following Christ, we need to learn to lean into God’s love and grace.

CONNECTING WITH LIFE:

GLOBAL APPLICATION: How do we begin to speak about doing the right thing in our world today? When the cost of doing right is high, and often offers little short-term gain, how do we do what is right? When our leaders are faced with fickle voters, partisan misrepresentation and opportunism, and pressure from interest groups that threaten to jump ship if they don’t get their way, how are they supposed to choose what is right? When business is measured quarterly and the stock market punishes anything but short-term gain-making strategies, how are corporations supposed to do the right thing? When we need power now, how do we do what is right by our planet? When we want the foods we love now, how do we grow and distribute food ethically? When we want to feel safe now, how do we negotiate and resist the temptation to go to war? When we need to grow the bottom line, how do we investigate labour practices of suppliers, or ensure raw materials are mined sustainably? In a world of instant gratification, media scrutiny and results-addiction, eternal reward and long-term results that benefit the least can be hard to sell. If we are to commit ourselves to being people who do the right thing, we will know the benefit – we will find life that is abundant and sustainable and good, and we will encounter God in our daily living. But, we will also know the cost – the sacrifice of some of our comforts, the misunderstandings and cynicism of those who stay committed to expediency, the anger of our leaders and peers as we challenge “the system”. But, if we will not pay the cost, what hope is there for us and our world?

LOCAL APPLICATION: Doing the right thing comes down to the small details of our lives as individual Christ-followers and as communities of faith. It is in the choices we make that God’s goodness is reflected to the world, and the true value of the Gospel is demonstrated. When we turn our faith into just another “quick-fix” or just another strategy for fast and easy personal gratification (which we all do all too often) then we deny ourselves the power and joy of God’s abundant life, and we fail to proclaim the power of the Gospel of Jesus. But, when we are prepared to pay the cost – to live a life of loving, serving and caring for the least, the outcast and the unlovely – the Gospel message shouts from our lives. When we work hard to make ethical choices about our food, our clothing, our energy needs, our mode of transport, these small sacrifices have a big impact on the lives of others and on the world at large – and the Gospel message shouts from our

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lives. When we are prepared to live in a way that is counter-cultural, denying the short-term approach of our society, and embracing the time frame of eternity, then we build a sustainable life for ourselves, and we contribute to the sustainability of the world – and the Gospel shouts from our lives. What “instant-gratification” choices are you making that need to change? What cost is God asking you to pay in order to live the Gospel in the daily details of your life? In what ways is the practical, life-giving, blessing of the Gospel being reflected in your life and your church?

SERMON OUTLINE

Lk 14:25-33 the cost of discipleship

Jesus is travelling south & *large crowds were travelling with him* - easy to follow in the crowd - but personal commitment/devotion/discipleship is different & more difficult.. Jesus challenges his followers to count the cost...

1. Following: *anyone who does not carry his cross (27) & follow me cannot be my disciple* - herein is the essence of discipleship! It meant facing the possibility of death for X's sake - as was the case with so many Xian martyrs..

2. Funding - building a watchtower in a vineyard - (v28) *estimate the cost* - otherwise > *ridicule* - *this man was not able to finish* - true of ant enterprise/building/project!

cf McCaig's Folly at Oban, Scotland - built by wealthy banker John Stewart McCaig in 1897 - copy of Colisseum;

Col Smelt's Memorial (Lt Gov IOM - d 1832) in square of Castletown - ran out of funds;

Watkin's Folly (Sir Edward - railway owner) on site of Wembley in 1892 to rival Eiffel Tower - blown up in 1907.

3. Fighting - *king about to go to war (31) - whether he is able with 10,000 to oppose one with 20,000* - if not, he will negotiate *terms of peace* - a wise move! >> Count the cost of discipleship - *any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple* - total dedication & commitment is required of all who would follow Jesus..

cf the rich young ruler - *went away sorrowful*;

cf disciples - *we have left everything to follow you* - the challenge to modern Xians!

By Norman Porteous

ONLINE SERMON SOURCES

[Sharing Your Faith,"](#) sermon discussion from Frederick Buechner, Frederick Buechner Blog.

<http://frederickbuechner.com/content/weekly-sermon-illustration-sharing-your-faith>

[Ministry Matters](#)

<http://www.ministrymatters.com/bin/6041/this-sunday-9813#axzz2cVq6qjbV>

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["Who Are We Without Our Stuff?"](http://day1.org/2194-who-are-we-without-our-stuff) the Rev. Laura Mariko Cheifetz, *Day 1*
<http://day1.org/2194-who-are-we-without-our-stuff>

["Discipleship Is Demanding!"](http://day1.org/1059-discipleship-is-demanding) the Rev. Dr. Leslie Holmes, *Day 1*
<http://day1.org/1059-discipleship-is-demanding>

CHILDREN

[Worshiping with Children](http://worshipingwithchildren.blogspot.co.uk/2013/08/year-c-proper-18-23rd-sunday-in.html), Proper 18, Including children in the congregation's worship, using the Revised Common Lectionary, Carolyn C. Brown, 2013.
<http://worshipingwithchildren.blogspot.co.uk/2013/08/year-c-proper-18-23rd-sunday-in.html>

["Children's Literature: A Resource for Ministry,"](http://storypath.wordpress.com/2010/08/30/lectionary-links-september-5-2010/) Connections: Jeremiah 18:1-11 and *A Single Shard*, Philemon 1-21 and *Samir and Yonatan*, Luke 14:25-33 and *The Story Blanket*. Union Presbyterian Seminary
<http://storypath.wordpress.com/2010/08/30/lectionary-links-september-5-2010/>

["Sermon of the Week,"](http://www.sermons4kids.com/) / ["Mensajes para ninos,"](http://www.sermons4kids.com/) Sermons 4 Kids, Charles Kirkpatrick, Object Lessons & Children's Sermons, Coloring Pages, Puzzles. Sermons4Kids.com.
<http://www.sermons4kids.com/>

[Story for Children's Worship and Family Activity](http://www.word-sunday.com/index.html), Ordinary 23, at *word-sunday.com: A Catholic Resource for the Lectionary* by Larry Broding.
<http://www.word-sunday.com/index.html>

["Shaped by God,"](http://www.sermons4kids.com/balloonanimals.html) ["Counting the Cost,"](http://www.sermons4kids.com/count-the-cost.html) Children's Sermons from Sermons4kids.com.
<http://www.sermons4kids.com/balloonanimals.html>
<http://www.sermons4kids.com/count-the-cost.html>