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THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

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Matthew 10.24-39

That's a strong passage we just heard , isn't it?
I'm sure it spoke clearly to the people for whom Matthew's gospel was written.
The gospel was written to Jewish Christians at the time
 when the church was welcoming Gentiles as fellow Christians
 without asking them to adopt Jewish religious practices.
This set up tension between Jewish Christians and their fellow Jews.
The book of Acts tells us of the trouble Paul had
 when he proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah in Jewish synagogues.
The churches to whom Matthew wrote probably experienced the same treatment.
This section of the Gospel is part of a commission Jesus gives his disciples
 when he sends them out to proclaim the good news in Israel.
Right from the beginning, the preaching of the gospel brings division:
 some accept it gladly, but others reject it violently.
Matthew's readers knew that from personal experience.

They also knew that the gospel could divide families.
That culture was one in which the family was all-important;
 one's identity was tied up with his or her family.
When some members of a family followed Jesus
 but the head of the family did not,
 painful family conflict resulted.
A divided household would have been a real tragedy.

But we live in a very different culture, don't we?
Religiously speaking, ours is pretty much a "live and let live" culture, isn't it?
Most of us have friends who aren't Presbyterian,
 and maybe even some who belong to different faiths
 or would say they have no religious faith at all.
We have trouble understanding people like ISIS,
 who believe everyone should agree with them religiously or die.

And our culture is individualistic, not family-centred.
That doesn't mean that family isn't important,
 but that we don't find the key to our identity in our family.
What are we likely to ask people when we first meet them:
 Who are your grandparents? Or
 What do you do for a living?

So, what does this passage have to say to us,

in St. Andrew`s Presbyterian Church, Calgary
in June of 2017 CE?

I think the main point of the passage is found at the end, in verses 37 to 39;

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

That's strong language, isn't it?

There's not much doubt about what Jesus says there, is there?

Jesus demands that he be first in our lives, that he take priority over everything else.

How do we do that, in our world and in our time?

Well, it begins with a commitment.

We have to commit ourselves to Jesus.

It's a lot like the words of commitment that we have all heard many times over:

I take you to be my spouse, to have and to hold from this day forward; for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, as long as we both shall live.

That, friends, is a commitment!

It is a commitment that is made in total ignorance of what lies ahead.

None of us who take that vow know what we are getting ourselves in for, do we?

But we take it nevertheless because, whatever life brings,
we want to face it with our beloved partner at our side.

We take it because we trust the person to whom we speak those words
to take the same vow and mean it.

Well, that's what Jesus wants from us.

He wants us to make the same kind of commitment to him.

He wants us to say:

I, Frank, take you, Jesus Christ, to be my Lord and Saviour.

Whatever life holds for me, I belong to you.

Whatever life holds for me, I trust you to be with me always.

Oh, there's nothing sacred about those particular words,
but the thought they express is of primary importance!

So, what does such a commitment mean in our daily lives?

What does it mean that Jesus is our Lord?

It means that everything I have belongs to him -

my time, my possessions, my loved ones, my activities, my energy, my all!

Let me say that again.

If you belong to Jesus, everything you have belongs to him.

Everything? Yes, everything.

That means that Jesus can tell you how to use your time,
your money, your relationships, your talents.

So how does that work out?

Well, don't get up in the morning and expect to find a set of instructions for the day.

For most people, certainly for me, it doesn't work that way.

Let me tell you how it has worked out for me in the matter of time.

When I was first in the ministry, I thought I had to plan out my week -
when I would study, when I would visit, etc.

But there were always interruptions-one after another.

That was frustrating, until it finally penetrated my thick skull
that the interruptions are the ministry!

But then it went the other way;

the interruptions took me away from my family too much,
and that was not good.

So I finally told my session that when I had time set aside for my family,
I would leave for anything that was important enough
that it would cause me to cancel a session meeting.

And that seemed to get me to proper balance.

I believed then, and believe now, that that was how Jesus wanted me to use my time.

That seemed to me to put into practice the love of God and of neighbour
which Jesus said is the essence of the commandments of God.

For me, today, the problem I wrestle with is how Jesus wants me to use my money.

I have no question that Jesus wants me to give to support the work of the Lord
and that he wants me to give sacrificially.

If my giving doesn't constrain my spending in other areas of life,
I don't think I'm giving as Jesus wants me to give.

And I'm sure that giving to the work of St. Andrew's,
where I am spiritually nourished
and where I am a part of the family of God
is a top priority.

I also believe that he made it very clear that we have a responsibility to help those in
need.

That was not a new idea; it is found clearly and frequently in the Old Testament.

For instance, the writer of Proverbs tells us

that if my neighbour needs help and I can help him today,
I shouldn't tell him to come back tomorrow.

But there are so many needs in our world, and so many requests for funds!

How do I know how much to give and through whom to give it?

That's a struggle with which I live these days.

But all of this - and this is the important thing -
all of this flows from the basic fact that I belong to Jesus.

At this point it may seem to you that belonging to Jesus is just one demand after another.
Is it worthwhile? Or is the cost of discipleship too high?

Well, let me just tell you that Christians down through the centuries
have seen belonging to Jesus in the most positive light.

For example, the Heidelberg Catechism, which was written during the Protestant
Reformation,

begins with this question: "What is your only comfort in life and in death?"
Here's the answer:

"That I am not my own, but belong - body and soul, in life and in death -
to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ

He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood,
and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil.

He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head
without the will of my Father in heaven.

In fact, all things must work together for my salvation.

Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life
and makes me whole-heartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him."

Did you get that? My only comfort is that I belong to Jesus!

And when I consider all that he has done and is doing for me,

I want nothing more than to serve him with all my heart and all my life.

Jesus demands that we put him first in our lives,
in every aspect of our lives.

But he makes that demand because he loves us,
because he loves us enough that he died for us.

because he loves us today and is with us always

to lead us into obedience to God,

to strengthen us in our weakness,

to comfort us in our sorrow,

to enable us to serve him daily,

to forgive us and restore us when we fail

and to give us all the joys of the children of God.

How do you respond to a love like that?

How do you respond to a love like that?