

## Sermon

### **“God’s Will, Not Ours” (Matthew 16:21-26)**

For Your Life in Christ the 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

August 31<sup>st</sup>, 2014

Saint Paul’s Lutheran Church of Irvine, CA (LC-MS)

Pastor Espinosa

### **Introduction: Bonhoeffer Quotes Luther in *Discipleship* (Luther is writing as if God is speaking to you)**

“Discipleship is not limited to what you can comprehend – it must transcend all comprehension. Plunge into the deep waters beyond your own comprehension, and I will help you to comprehend even as I do. Bewilderment is the true comprehension. Not to know where you are going is the true knowledge. My comprehension transcends yours. Thus Abraham went forth from his father and not knowing whither he went. He trusted himself to my knowledge, and cared not for his own, and thus he took the right road and came to his journey’s end. Behold, that is the way of the cross. You cannot find it yourself, so you must let me lead you as though you were a blind man. Wherefore it is not you, no man, no living creature, but I myself, who instruct you by my word and Spirit in the way you should go. Not the work which you choose, not the suffering you devise, but the road which is clean contrary to all that you choose or contrive or desire – that is the road you must take. To that I call you and in that you must be my disciple. If you do that, there is the acceptable time and there your master is come.” (*The Cost of Discipleship*, First Macmillan Paperbacks Edition, 103-104)

- A. On account of our sin, however, we constantly fight against the call to discipleship; we want to hold onto *our* comprehension instead of trusting in the Lord’s comprehension for us.
- B. Moses, Isaiah, and Jeremiah argued against God’s call to them even though the Lord knew exactly what He was doing.
  - 1. Moses said, “I can’t speak well enough!”
  - 2. Isaiah said, “I’m too unclean, not good enough!”
  - 3. Jeremiah said, “I’m too young!”
- C. God calls us to discipleship too! But what is our excuse? We must remember who we truly are and to whom we truly belong!

### **Part I: Your New Identity:**

- A. We have watered down the word “Christian,” esp. in American culture.
- B. The word literally and actually means “Christ’s” ... or in elongated form “one who BELONGS to Christ.”
- C. Notice how this concept is applied to the Church, the body of Christ:

**1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6:19:** “*Or don’t you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own.*”

- D. Discipleship begins with this fundamental truth: We do not belong to ourselves, we belong to God.

- E. The Christian, therefore, is a “disciple” – one who is a “hearer” of Christ and therefore (and as a result of hearing the Word of Christ and thereby being drawn to Christ) – is one who FOLLOWS Christ.

**Matthew 16:24:** *“Then Jesus told his disciples, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.’”*

## **Part II: But In Order For This to Happen We Must Die**

- A. Remember that Peter once denied Jesus three times. He said, “I don’t know the man!” That part of us is dead!
- B. We use these words against ourselves! The Christian is confronted with their sinful flesh that says, “I don’t want to follow!” And the Christian’s trained response is, “I don’t know the man!” “The man” = our sinful nature.
- C. You’ve heard the expression when someone is so hurt or ashamed of someone else, they say, “You are dead to me.”  
That means the relationship is completely severed; it is over with! This is our daily call: die to yourself; die to your old sinful nature!

**Romans 6:11:** *“So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”*

## **Part III: But We Can’t Die To Ourselves without the Grace of God**

- A. In fact – left to ourselves – it is impossible!
- B. The Lord in His grace therefore -- in His very call to discipleship -- provides all we need to become His disciples!
- C. He gives us for example Holy Baptism where at every Baptism we witness God’s work upon us! This is what occurred in your baptism. Don’t forget what God did!
  - 1. A funeral (of the old man, old Adam, sinful nature) put to death by God.
  - 2. A resurrection (of the new man, the new creation, the born-again child of God) which is a resurrection by God.
- D. Review of our catechism:

*Question: “What does such baptizing with water indicate?”*

*Answer: “It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”*

## **Part IV: In This Work of God by the Power of His Word leading us to drown/die daily and arise/live daily, the Lord frequently permits a “CROSS”:**

- A. We are not supposed to take Matthew 16:24 in a monastic sense where we impose suffering on ourselves in order to merit grace or achieve holiness. Doesn’t work that way!
- B. You know the old saying, “Don’t go looking for trouble!”
  - C. God is saying instead, “Live in my Son.” “Listen to Him.” “Trust Him.” “Follow Him.” He puts Christ before us so that in Christ we remain disciples as His Word and Sacrament draws us and keeps us in Himself. It is the rest of the teaching that can be hard to accept, but it takes us back to *His* ways (or as Luther said *His* “comprehension”) instead of our own.

**Conclusion: To Keep Us Realizing That We Need Christ, He Permits – In Mercy – A Cross:**

- A. Again, we do not choose our crosses. They are rather put upon us as we live in faith in Christ.
- B. Crosses are by definition, painful **and designed to kill.**
- C. Our crosses take on the form of many things: a loss of health, a loss of a loved one, a loss of a job, a loss of a home; events that cause grief and bereavement; a sense of heaviness and a great burden. A cross may just be the hard work of being faithful in holy vocation.
- D. Many Christians who go through their cross are secretly tempted to think that their cross means that they are not truly Christian, but this is a misconception.
- E. Back up and ask, “When I feel this way, what do I really know?” The Christian knows this: **“I absolutely need God!”**
- F. The cross is given so that we die to ourselves and turn to Jesus Christ whose cross was carried not for Himself, but for YOU! So Saint Paul learned another view about being crucified:

**Galatians 2:20:** *“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”*

- G. Do you see Paul’s focus after he speaks of the crucifixion of His flesh? It is the Gospel that Jesus **loved him and gave Himself for him! This is true for YOU as well!**
- H. So after we tell our old sinful self, “I don’t know you,” we accept our cross and bear it for our own good, for the good of our family, for the good of our church, and for the good of our neighbor. In our cross, we BEAR!

**Galatians 6:2:** *“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”*

**End with a story:** *Our cross becomes a thing of beauty! Art & Shirley Edwards: A husband who took care of his wife with ALS. Art did a little more than the ice bucket challenge.*