



Poland Presbyterian Church

At the Green since 1802

2 Poland Manor
Poland, Ohio 44514
330-757-1547

June 22, 2014

12th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Matthew 10:24-39

The Rev. Robbin Del Nagro

The Cost of Discipleship

John Sutton just told us that it is not about us and that theme is woven all through today's Gospel Lesson, difficult as it may seem to understand. In our world we pay attention to cultural idols, athletes who are overpaid and aggrandize themselves, movie stars who wallow in shallow self absorption, and rich business people who exploit others to elevate their own status. In a world like this can our idol is still be Jesus? Jesus never needed self indulgence like this to know who he was for he was a truly authentic human being and at the same time being truly God, the one worthy of our idolatry. In this passage from Matthew Jesus, our idol, doesn't seem to be the peace bringer, meek, mild, and humble, but rather gives us some difficult directives to chew on.

At first read it seems that Jesus is a home wrecker, but indeed, at the time Matthew was written, Christians were often forced to choose between family and Christ. We sometimes worry excessively about our own family members who no longer see a need for the church despite our faithful nurture and teaching of of them when they were young. Still, we are called to put discipleship above our worry. Should their lack of faith deter us in our walk? No matter what our family thinks of us, we are still accountable to Christ. We are called to be disciples first and foremost. A disciple is a life long student, one who is always learning what it means to grow in Christ's teachings. It is through that life long learning that we come to know that it is "not about me." That means that we are often forced to make radical choices.

Sometimes those choices come when we are confronted with a loved one who is in need of our care. Our plans for a retirement when we can enjoy the fruits of our labors are often aborted when we must choose another's welfare

over our own. We have many in our congregation who are now serving as caregivers for spouses, parents, siblings, and even children. Here is the story of one such person. She is not a member of this congregation but she could be.

I'm a caregiver to my husband who was diagnosed with Parkinson's. It's been a long, long journey but, it's just beginning. I have been doing it alone for 3yrs. He's not the man I married 44yrs ago and I feel so helpless some days. Our children have their own lives and they are struggling accepting their dad this way. We have our church family and they are a great support. I'm just worried about him falling so much and getting hurt. As it is I can't get him up. My nerves are shot and I live on pins and needles all the time.

People in our congregation who are caregivers are living out the command to care for others as if they were Christ. I see them every week. It is not easy and yet these caregivers get up again each morning and care for their loved one, tend to their needs, watch their failing health, and keep on loving them. They keep on caring because they are disciples of Christ and they have learned that it is not about them, but about the other.

Those who serve the church in various ministries, deacons and elders, both ruling elders and teaching elders are also called to put service to Christ before their own needs. Today we are celebrating the ministry of a man who has done that for fifty years of continuous ministry. The Rev. Dr. Bob Hoover has served the church for three quarters of his lifetime. He has learned all too well that ministry is not about him, but about others. You have called me to be your Temporary Pastor for a time as you have called these deacons and elders. Your expectation is that we will be humble enough to serve all of you as if we are serving Christ himself. Dr. Hoover worked tirelessly here among you for seventeen years. He was administrator, preacher, teacher, and pastor to you, putting your needs above his own. It is fitting that today he should take his well deserved rest and be honored by us. He is a disciple of Christ and discipleship comes at a great cost.

What is it that causes us to put ourselves first rather than others? Is it fear? Jesus tells his disciples in this passage from Matthew not to fear. In fact, he tells them this over and over throughout the gospels. Our deepest fear is that we are alone in the universe and that God does not even know we exist. Fear binds us up and keeps us from being able to focus on others. Fear keeps us from loving others fully. But Jesus tells us that God does care about us. God cares about this congregation and our needs. God has sent caring pastors to this congregation, continues to do so now, and will bring the right pastoral

leadership to you in the future. Resting ourselves in that assurance we can then ask the question, “not what is Christ doing to make my life better but what am I do to make Christ's life better?” That means we need to ask ourselves what we are doing to bring into reality God's vision for our world?

Pastor and spiritual director the Rev. Dr. Delmer Chilton says, “It's not about you. It's not about how many people like you. It's not about you and your wonderful family, your successful and prosperous life. It's just not.” We are not called into discipleship to be liked by others. Sometimes we have to stand up for difficult truths. While we would like to be in agreement on all things sometimes we are not. As deacons and elders we are not always going to be liked for the decisions we make. Sometimes we have to stand up for Christ as those before us have done – people like Dietrich Bonhoeffer who stood up against the German church when it allied itself with Nazi policy and tried to call it Jesus' will; people like John Calvin and Martin Luther who stood up against the corruption of the church and demanded reform, people like the abolitionists who fought to end slavery even though slave holders quoted scripture to defend slavery. These were not well liked people at the time. Their actions did not bring harmony but a sword to the church, but they were people who did not fear other people, rather they only feared God.

While this passage of scripture may be difficult to understand, we know that the bottom line is that the cost of discipleship is great, but we are not left alone. Walking with Christ we have nothing to fear because just as God cares for the meager sparrows, much more does he care for us. Shouldn't we then care for him?

Let us pray:

Loving God who cares for the sparrow and for us, help us to acknowledge that serving you means serving others. It means putting you and the needs of others before our own. It isn't easy and we need your reassurance that we can do it. Help us to be humble servants as your son, Jesus Christ, has shown us in his life and example. In his name we pray. Amen.