

The Cost of Discipleship

Matthew 10:32-42, Trinity Sunday VIII

July 29, 2007

Beloved of the Lord....Most of you know, the former professor of our LCR seminary, Pastor Sheldon Twenge. Years ago he was the pastor of this congregation, after which he became professor at Martin Luther Institute of Sacred Studies. When I was in the seminary, he was my teacher. When I first read our text for this week, I remembered a little parable he told me. There once was a man who carried a large wooden cross upon his back day by day. Wherever he went, going to or from work, or walking home, he carried this cross. He didn't like the cross he carried. Often he would mumble and complain and wish his burdens lighter. One day, as he was walking through town, he happened to spot a shop, a store filled with many wooden crosses of every shape and size. He walked up to the glass window and looked in, all excited. "Here is my chance," he thought to himself! "Surely I can trade in my own cross for a different one and if I make a good trade, my cross will be smaller and lighter. He quickly set his own cross aside, and went into the shop searched diligently for the perfect cross. After searching for several minutes, he came to discover that all the crosses in the shop were quite large. While there was a large variation, and each cross uniquely shaped, they all appeared to be quite heavy. He thought to himself, "I don't have it that bad. Some people have much heavier crosses to bear." And once he realized that, he walked out of that store and happily took up his cross. And as he placed that cross once again upon his shoulders, suddenly it wasn't so heavy. And while the weight and burden of his cross had not changed in the least, because of what he had just witnessed, his cross was now very light. He walked on joyfully and happy that day, for the cross that God had given him was no longer hard to bear.

Dear Christians, if we are to follow Christ, each of us will have a cross we must bear. Jesus said to His own disciples, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." There is a cost to discipleship. There are burdens we must bear. Often to our shame, we murmur and complain about our cross, or with covetous eyes we look at the lives of other Christians, and we think their cross is lighter than our own. And when we think our cross too heavy, we ought to remember the cross that our blessed Jesus bore for our sake. We look "unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." Heb. 12:2 Jesus in His heart, carried His cross with JOY, in the knowledge of the prize which awaited at the end, namely the salvation of your soul! When we hear this wondrous Gospel message, how

heavy....really....is our cross? Won't we gladly bear our cross, whatever it may be, for His sake? For Jesus said, "Come unto me, all *ye* that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke *is* easy, and my burden is light." Mt. 11 When we hear the Gospel, when we hear that all our sins are forgiven because Jesus carried the cross for us, suddenly our cross becomes light. Like the man who left the shop with joy, taking up his own light cross, so do we.

In our text today, Jesus first speaks of confessing Christ. True disciples of the Lord confess Him as their Savior. It is His grace first and foremost that we confess. In doing so, on the Day of Judgment, Jesus will likewise confess us before our heavenly Father above. Heaven is the home of all who confess Christ Jesus! But while we are on earth, we should remember that everything we do and say ought to reflect the love of God living and working in our heart. Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commandments." If we truly love God, we will keep His commandments. If we do not love God, we will do whatever we choose, and God will judge us for these sins. Many in our world today are deceived into thinking that God's forgiveness of sins is God's permission to sin. But it is not! How can we that are dead to sin live any longer therein? If we think that the forgiveness of sins from God is permission from God to sin, than our faith is dead, and truly it is no faith at all. Forgiveness of sins is never EVER permission to sin. And so we either confess the Lord, or deny Him. There is no middle ground.

Those who confess Christ before men, such will gladly give all glory to the Holy Ghost, who has taught this truth to their heart, giving peace. But this inward spiritual peace does not guarantee outward physical peace. Jesus said, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword." While the preaching of the Gospel works peace and joy into each believing heart, those who reject the Gospel will oppose those who believe the Gospel. The enemies of the Lord will take up the sword against all God's children. Jesus said, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." Jn. 16:33

This tribulation or war against God's children takes place here on earth, sometimes in our own household! Jesus said, "For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household." It is not that God desires war within one's household, rather it is that the Lord foresaw the evil fruit of those who reject the Gospel. For the rejection of the Gospel estranges both friends and family. When not all in a household believe,

those who do not believe will make life hard for those who do believe. Unbelieving sons will speak evil to their believing fathers. Unbelieving daughters will speak evil to their believing mothers. And so Jesus says, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." But how should we understand all of this?

First let us remember that we are to love our family, regardless of faith or lack thereof. Jesus teaches, "Love thy neighbor as thyself" and also "Love you enemies". And so even if it happens to be that one of our own family members is an unbeliever, we are to love them with a holy and pure heart, perfectly, in the same way that Jesus loves us. However, our merciful Lord also teaches that we are never to love family more than God and His Word. For the conclusion of loving family more than God is unbelief. At times there will be hard decisions in our life that we must make, decisions between family and God. Whom will we love more? Will we allow the unbelief of our family to interfere with our faith? Will we compromise our conscience or God's Word for the sake of family?

It is for our own good that God warns us about unbelief within our own family. He does not desire that we lose our salvation because of greater love for family. In the Christian faith, water must be thicker than blood. For God, by the power of His Word in Holy Baptism, has made all believers His own adopted children. He gave birth to you, a new birth, a second birth, by the power of the Gospel Word. He adopted you as His own with His own blood, writing His name upon your heart. Oh if only we could fully understand the great mercies of God, that He can call us His own son or daughter....that God can call sinners such as ourselves, His beloved children....even the apple of His eye, precious in His sight! "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." Gal. 3:26 "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!" Dear friend, are you one of God's children, and how do you know? You know by faith. If in your heart you believe Christ to be your perfect Savior from sin, do not fear! God's own Spirit will help to testify this truth to your heart. The Bible says, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together."

As Christ suffered, so will we. As Christ carried His cross, so we will have our crosses to bear. And what is this Christian cross? It is all hardships that we bear because we confess the name of Christ. Sometimes such hardships even come from our own family. Nevertheless, do not forget, never forget, God will help you to bear

your burdens! He will also grant you the strength to persevere and overcome all things by faith. And though we may suffer many things specifically because we follow our Lord Jesus, by the grace of God, the end of our journey is life everlasting! "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." And Jesus said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." We pass from death unto life, when we die in the faith of the Lord Jesus. Believers do not carry their cross into heaven. Our crosses are permanently removed when we enter into the bliss of our Savior above.

Our last and final point for the day is found in the words of Jesus who said, "He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me." This means first that we are to receive the words of God that are brought faithfully to us by the Lord's disciples. It also means we are to treasure and do good to the Gospel messengers of the Lord. For Jesus wants all His disciples to know how we are to treat those who speak His Word faithfully. The Scriptures say, "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" I'm sure all of us have beloved ministers in our memories who brought the joyous Gospel to our hearts! But these words of Jesus also hold true to any layman, woman, or child, who brings God's Word to us! Thus if we show favor and good will to our fellow believers by our actions and deeds, such is pleasing to the Lord. God notes all good works which proceed from faith. "And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward." The meaning of this is simple. We are to love and do good to our fellow Christians. And even if our act of love is small, even the giving of a cold cup of water to a little child of God, such works please our heavenly Father above! And there is a reward for such, a reward of grace to all who do God's will faithfully.

And so beloved brethren, let us patiently bear each cross the Lord has given us. His strength will sustain us. Let us love our families, yet let not that love interfere with our love for our blessed Savior. Let us likewise do good to those who bring us the Gospel, and even to the little lambs who are precious in His sight. And finally while God may require us to carry a cross, and that cross may indeed be heavy, believers do not carry their cross into heaven. Amen.