

“May we be like trees
planted by streams of water;
yielding fruit that prospers others.” AMEN!

Well, here we go again.

As most of us prepare for a restful long weekend,
Jesus brings forth the hard truth, again.

Who wants to hear these words today,
on a Labor Day weekend, while
we might be planning time with the family,
and perhaps gathering for picnics?

Jesus talks about hating family members and
giving away our picnic baskets, if
we want to follow him.

Why couldn't today's gospel be
the feeding of the five thousand or
a text that speaks about the value of
rest and sabbath?

Those are more fitting for
a holiday weekend and for a baptism.

I feel like we need to apologize to little Zoe,
our newly baptized, for such a lesson as this

on her day. (-)

But, here's the thing.

This text is not for her ears but for ours.

Just like Jesus' words were for those
who were following him.

Some were there just for the energy and
experience of being with Jesus.

What a feeling to just be in that presence!
To say, "I'm with Him!"

We begin with recognizing
the "Large crowds now traveling with Jesus."

The crowd had been growing as people
came for encouragement and for healing.

So, in the same way we talked (last week)
about our call to not lump all Pharisees into
a monolith of bad people,

we are wise to not lump all of
Jesus' crowd of followers to be devoted
to his cause and purpose, as good people.

Weren't they all the "good guys" since
they were in the Jesus crowd?

Not so fast, knowing what we know
about human beings, it's likely there
were percentages of devoted people,
along with the percentages of
seekers and the curious,

and of course, there were those
just going along for the ride.

Today's lesson is an important time where
Jesus spoke honestly for everyone,
including us, to hear.

The words of Jesus are really important to hear
and we shouldn't spend a lot of time
looking for loopholes or wiggle room when
it comes to our answering to Him. (Pause)

In our day, we hear a lot about
something that's happening.

This something is called "Quiet quitting."

It is the current "buzz word" phrase and
the best I can tell it means when a person
ceases to go above and beyond in their work.

Quiet quitting is a term used to describe people
that are doing what is written in
their job description and that's it.

The basic employment requirements, period.

No above and beyond, no extra mile.

Now, I'm not saying all
quiet quitters are bad,
they aren't.

Some may be quiet quitting for self care reasons,
or even as protest against the salary
they receive.

People are quiet quitting because they
don't feel appreciated and they are biding
their time to quit for real because

they've lost the passion in their current profession. Hmm.

But, when it comes to following Jesus,
when it comes to the point where
walking a life with God may negatively
affect current relationships,
when it comes to bearing the cross,

Jesus warns that not one of us
can be a quiet quitter AND follow Him. (Pause)

So, even though the phrase “quiet quitter” is new,
Jesus refers to the human reaction that
exists in response to what is being
asked of us.

And the way we make excuses to not follow
reveals that we hold back.

Look, I’m not going to say that
the damaged familial relationships,
the exclusions that will come when
we speak in favor of those
who are discriminated against, or

say that the suffering we may encounter is not real.

I’m not going to say they are bad excuses,
but they should be named.

What’s holding you back?

What is holding us,
as a church community, back?

In one of the commentaries I read for today,
Cameron Howard reported that we may

invoke Yoda here:

“hmm, Do or do not; there is no try.” :-)

The journey involved in following Christ is not easy
and there will be always something
that stands in the way, but
Jesus wants us to be all in.

Not be lukewarm or distracted,
God wants us to be leery of possessions,
to not come to church with the sole
purpose of gaining personal comfort.

We need that, of course, but this Jesus
did not come to just comfort you or me so
that we are stagnant.

He came to overthrow the evil forces
that human beings latch onto and

His example teaches us to not pass
forward selfish ideals
or silently allowing distorted
government and false religion
to keep a few in power
just because it's good
for business.

We must not look away and
we cannot stay silent. (Pause)

Come to think of it, this text turns out
to be a perfect one to be held on a day
when we gather together

to celebrate baptism and
encounter long weekends.

All of today's readings are right on the money,
in fact, because while Jesus counts
the difficult costs of following him,

we are not given the count of blessings here
but they are present in the gospel of Luke and
they are present in the other texts assigned.

The blessings are that we become part of
a movement that chooses a life that
walks alongside God both in rest and at work,

and we do it for the sake of future generations,
for children like Zoe to have a better community;
a better world.

Imagine us, a society that speaks
so strongly about freedom,
making decisions that best set up

a life of prosperity and health
for our children.

You won't hear a politician platforming on that!

They won't win because people too often
want the blessing right now.

And it is there but not always in the way
we expected or even hoped.

With Jesus it is a matter of choice and
when we choose a life of walking with God,
we get to partner in that better future
for descendants.

And what a blessing that is, right now!

“God sets before us life and death,
blessings and adversity...” the choice looks easy...
who wouldn't choose life and blessings?

But too often, without thinking deeply,
we choose the death and curses.

Addictions, malaise, apathy, the need to always win,
these lead to death and adversity.

We do it because we've bought into

the notion of measuring ourselves against other,
stepping on others to get better seats,
and doing whatever it takes to win.

The choice looks easy but it's not unless
you're paying attention.

So it's not so much that Jesus wants
a perfect disciple as it is about

Jesus wanting us to see what
the world would look like if people
really followed him.

I can't follow Jesus for you and
you can't follow Jesus for me, but we can
follow Christ for ourselves and for the
blessings on the
future generations to come.

AMEN!