

“GIVING UP: II - SECURITY”

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Luke 13:31-35

As most of you know by now, about a month ago I was in a car accident where my car was totaled. So I had the wonderful joy (not!) of buying a new car. Now, I have to say that I wasn't happy about it. Not only because of the accident, but because my old car was perfectly fine. Oh, it was a little worn and marked up, but it was perfectly fine. Had 112,000 miles on it, and, best of all, it was paid for! So, buying a new car was not the adventure it might have been under other circumstances.

At any rate, when it came to looking for a new car, I discovered that what I was looking for in this car was a whole lot different from previous car buying experiences. Previously, I looked for a car with a nice shape and nice color, and with a price I could handle. If it had good mileage, all the better.

This time, the first thing on my mind was safety and reliability. I credit the safety features in my other car for saving my life - the side curtain air bags in the driver window saved my head from crashing into the window. So, this time I went after a car rated high in safety and reliability. You know what? My new car is equipped with ten air bags - count 'em - 10! The salesman said that ought to keep me safe and secure. Let's hope!

And isn't that what all of us want in life? To be safe and secure? We do what we can to make sure that's the case. We take control of things and put systems in place to lower our risk - whether that means to our physical lives, or our time, or our participation in things. We do everything we can to lower risk for ourselves.

And, in some ways, truth be told, we do that with our faith lives as well. Too often we choose the path of least resistance, the comfortable way, the way we control. We come to worship, go to Sunday School or a Bible study, maybe sing in the choir or serve as an usher or greeter or reader, we give our offerings - both money and gifts. It's all very nice and good, and well, comfortable. It's safe.

Trouble is, as we will see vividly in this morning's Gospel lesson, comfort is not the life to which we are called as disciples of Christ. Comfort, security, playing

it safe - that's not what we're supposed to be all about.

Do you remember hearing this poem about a man who played it safe? It goes like this:

There was a very cautious man who never laughed or played;
he never risked, he never tried, he never sang or prayed.
And when one day he passed away his insurance was denied;
For since he never really lived, they claimed he never died!
(Source Unknown)

Jesus never called us to live life safely or cautiously when it comes to faith. Jesus calls for radical obedience, radical involvement, total trust in following where God leads. It's not something we talk about as often as we should. Tony Campolo said in one of his books, "Preachers seldom want to talk about the cost of discipleship. At one point in His preaching career (Campolo writes), Jesus had more than five thousand followers, but when He preached one particular sermon, He alienated all but twelve of them. It was the sermon in which He spelled out the cost of discipleship. After His followers heard what was expected of them, and what it would cost them, most of them left Him." (Tony Campolo, *Let Me Tell You a Story*, p. 89)

In this morning's Gospel lesson, we see what following God's will was costing Jesus. He was being targeted by Herod. Herod was out to get Him. There was a price on Jesus' head. He was so much a threat to Herod, that Herod wanted Him gone.

Following God's will for His life, doing what He knew God had sent Him to do, was incredibly risky - it was putting Him under threat of death at the hands of an earthly ruler. And yet, Jesus could do no other, and would do no other. The life of faith is not a life surrounded by air bags, if you will, it's not a life of security, it's a life filled with risk.

Writer James Moore put it this way: "This is serious business . . . When Jesus says, 'Follow me,' he doesn't mean, 'Let's walk around the corner together,' or 'Let's jog back to town together.' He is playing for keeps! He is asking for our devotion, our trust, our service, our loyalty. He is asking for our lives - our hearts, our souls, our minds, our strength. He is calling us to be his disciples. He is asking us to trust in him, to risk for him, and to work for him." (James Moore, *Attitude is Your Paintbrush*, p. 89)

Jesus asks us to do for Him, what He did for God. Jesus could have played it safe, He could have had a "comfortable" ministry on this earth. He could have

hung out with the religious people and soaked up their admiration. He could have held their hands and prayed with them, taken care of the easy things, been comfortable - been the “gentle Jesus, meek and mild” we see in the pictures of Him holding a lamb or a little child.

But Jesus was more than that - so much more. And that’s what got Him into trouble - His radical obedience to love the way God called Him to love. He not only cared for the religious people, but He cared for the outsiders, the outcast, the others, sinners. People would have been okay with Jesus reaching out in care, until, well, he reached out to someone like Zaccheus, a cheating tax collector; or the woman who had had so many husbands and was living with a man who was not her husband. They would have been okay with Jesus talking about what matters in life, if he hadn’t shown it in living color by overturning the moneychangers’ tables in the temple. That was too much for them! They would have been okay with Jesus asking them to make an offering, but when He started to say “Give all you have to the poor!” and how rich people couldn’t get into heaven, well, that was way too radical. It would cost Him his life. But He could do no other. His discipleship - His following the will of His Father was costly.

And so it is for us, as well, my friends. Discipleship is costly, it is not for the faint of heart, and it is not for those who want security. But it is the pathway to life, real, true, abundant, eternal life. It is the pathway to deep, inner joy - if we’ll have the courage to walk it.

It is your task, as a disciple of Christ, to figure out where He wants you to walk and what He wants you to do. When you feel a nudge in your soul - whether it’s a nudge that stirs you up, or a nudge that scares you - you can be sure that God is trying to get your attention.

Ask anyone who goes for the very first time to work at the homeless shelter. If you’ve never been there before, it’s a great unknown. It can be scary to consider. It probably is way out of your comfort zone. Chances are that you won’t know a soul there, and chances are pretty likely, that you have no idea what the life of a homeless person is like - and that can be scary.

Or how about when we offered the opportunity to go out into the neighborhoods around the church and knock on doors? That was incredibly scary. What would people say? How would they treat you? Would you be seen as pushy? Would you have a door slammed in your face?

Those are some pretty risky things. But for you, it might be even closer to home. What if I asked if you would read the Gospel lesson in front of the church? Or what if you were challenged to give more sacrificially, to give until it hurts? What about changing seats, giving up “your pew” so that a first time guest could sit

there? Or what about praying with someone, or telling them about Jesus? What about speaking out against a racial or ethnic joke, or taking a stand against injustice in some form?

Are you starting to squirm in your seat yet? You see, this business of discipleship is risky stuff. Security is not a part of it. It's not supposed to be, because in the end, isn't discipleship about trusting God? Isn't it about trusting that where God sends you, He will equip you; where He leads you, He will walk with you? Isn't it about knowing that He will never call you to do anything alone - He will always be by your side?

I know we know all that, but still, too often, we opt for the comfortable and secure. We stay in our comfort zone - we play it safe. Let me turn again to Tony Campolo, and tell you about how he had a rude awakening one day, and he realized how he had been playing it safe. It was on the occasion of his 10th high school reunion, and he met up with some old friends. One of them was a guy with whom he'd been pretty close in high school. They had played basketball and hung out together.

So they began talking at this reunion and he told Tony that he had recently had the most fantastic experience of his life. He had become a Christian! He told Tony how he had changed, and how his life was so much fuller and richer now. He was just filled with excitement and couldn't tell Tony enough about it!

Finally, when he took a breath, Tony said, "Jerry, I'm so glad to hear this. You know I'm a Christian too!"

Jerry said, "When did you become a Christian?" And Tony said that he had been one since he was a little boy. To that, Jerry responded very seriously, "If you were a Christian when we were in high school together, how come you never told me about Jesus? How come you never introduced me to Christ?" (Tony Campolo, *Let Me Tell You a Story*, p. 111)

Tony was doing what we all too often do - we stay comfortable and safe and silent - when Jesus calls us to do otherwise. To step out like He did, and live radical lives of discipleship.

What might Jesus be calling you to do with your life? During the season of Lent, I invite all of us to think about the lives of discipleship we are leading. You know, our church's mission statement is that we are to be a place where people come to know Jesus, be known by Him, and make Him known to others? How are you helping that happen? Are you telling people about Jesus, inviting them to come to know Him? Do your closest friends even know you're a Christian (like Tony and Jerry)?

Is Christ being known by others through your love, your actions, your life in the world? Has God given you gifts that you're not using for His work in the world? Are you playing it safe, or are you willing to step out and take a risk for Christ?

This Lenten journey is a time to consider these things, and to make changes, if needed. Do that, knowing that you do not do it alone. You are surrounded here by a community of brothers and sisters in Christ, called to live radically, just as you are, and willing to stand by your side and walk with you as you do.

Let me finish with one more word of assurance for you as you answer the challenge to radical discipleship. One day a group of botanists went on an expedition into a hard-to-reach location in the Alps, searching for new varieties of flowers. At one point, one of the scientists was looking through his binoculars and spotted a beautiful, rare species growing at the bottom of a deep ravine. To reach it, someone would have to be lowered into the ravine. Noticing a local youngster standing by watching them, the botanist asked him, "Will you help us get that flower down there?" They told him they would tie a rope around him and lower him down so he could get the flower for them.

The boy came over and peered down into the ravine, and like any young boy would be, was excited at the prospect of the adventure of it all. Then, he stepped back, and said, "Wait a minute. I'll be right back." He ran off, and in a few minutes, he was back, accompanied by an older man. He walked up to the group and said, "Okay, I'll go over the cliff now and get the flower for you, but this man must hold the rope. He's my Dad!" (Sermonillustrations.com)

Hmmm . . . not a bad way to look at walking the path of radical discipleship, is it? We can do it because our Father in heaven will be holding the rope, as it were. He will be with us, not only compelling us to reach out and take risks to live as people of faith, but also giving us what we need to do it, and most of all, being right by our side through it all.

The question for you and me is - will we do it? Will we step out in faith and be the disciples He wants us to be? In this Lenten season, and all the days ahead, may you and I have the courage to say "Yes." May it be so.

Amen.