

“HE NEVER SAID IT WOULD BE EASY: V – ‘SELL ALL YOU HAVE”

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Pentecost Sunday

Acts 2:1-21

Matthew 19:16-30

Today is one of the three biggest festival days in the Christian year. There's Christmas, of course, and Easter, and today, Pentecost Sunday, is the third. Now, I suspect if I had asked you what the third biggest day in the Christian year was, a lot of you might have trouble coming up with it, because here in America, we don't make such a big deal of it. But in other places around the world – oh, my! – they do it up right. Pentecost is a huge celebration!

When my brother Jeff was in the Army stationed in Germany, he got to see that first hand, because there they put together great huge bonfires and gather around them to remember the powerful gift of the Holy Spirit that descended on Pentecost, and the flaming tongues that appeared that day. It's a huge celebration for them, and it is for us as well, because Pentecost is known as the day the Christian church began.

You heard the lesson, the “incredibly difficult to read” lesson that Joe read. Jesus had promised after his resurrection and before he ascended into heaven that he would send the Holy Spirit – and that's what he did on the Day of Pentecost – in a mighty way. A roaring sound like the rush of a mighty wind swept over, and tongues as of fire appeared, and then when the Word was spoken, everyone was able to understand it clearly, even though they spoke many different languages. It was an incredible moment in time – so incredible, so convincing of the power and presence of Almighty God, that the scripture tells us that three thousand people professed Jesus as their Lord and Savior that very day – and thus, the Christian church was born.

That's what we celebrate today – God's Spirit which touched the hearts of so many that day, and God's Spirit which continues to touch us and fill us and move us to this day. That's why we always choose the Day of Pentecost on which to confirm our youth confirmation class – to remind them that they follow in a long line of faithful disciples who have given their hearts and their lives to Jesus, and more importantly, to remind them that the Spirit which touched and filled those disciples is the very same Holy Spirit which touches and fills them this day.

That day was a great moment of celebration and today is a great moment of celebration. But it's more than that, because the Pentecost story isn't just about what happened to those disciples that day, but what happened to them on the day after and the day after that and the day after that.

What I mean is that I wonder how long it took those three thousand people to discover that being a disciple of Jesus Christ is not just all happiness and light, moments of joy and celebration? I wonder how long it took them to realize the cost of discipleship.

What cost? Take a look at today's Gospel lesson. **That** cost. Many of you probably remember the story from Sunday School – of the rich young ruler. He came to Jesus to ask what he had to do to inherit eternal life, and after Jesus told him to follow the rules – love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength; love your neighbors, follow the commandments; and he assured Jesus he was doing that, Jesus lowered the boom, if you will. He said to him, "Sell all you have." Sell all you have, wow! He was young and he was rich, and the scripture pretty much tells us it was too much for him – and he turned and walked away.

That's the cost of discipleship I'm talking about. Ours is not an easy calling, we who claim Jesus as our Lord and Savior, but as I've said through this whole sermon series, "Jesus never said it would be easy." What he said, over and over again is that he would be with us through it all, and the path we would travel, though costly, would be the path to life – real, true, abundant life.

So, I say to the confirmands today, what you're about to do is going to cost you. To be a disciple of Jesus Christ means caring more about others than about yourself at times, giving up things you want in order that others may have what they need, standing up for what is right when others would try to draw you into things that are wrong.

You know what I think Jesus was saying to that rich young ruler. "My son, you need to be **all in**. It's all or nothing. Give everything you have in your life to me. Let me guide you in how you use everything you have – your time, your talent, your work, your education, your money, your possessions – everything." Go "**all in**" and center everything you do on your love for Jesus.

And I guarantee if you do that, it will cost you.

For some followers of Jesus, over the centuries, it has cost them their lives. It cost the Apostle Peter his life. It cost martyrs like Dietrich Bonhoeffer his life. It cost people like Martin Luther King, Jr., whose faith in a just God caused him to work for justice for all of God's people, his life. Sometimes, being "all in" as a faithful follower of Jesus, means your very life.

But more often, being “all in” as a faithful follower of Jesus, will cost you in other ways. I read something very sad this week about one of the professors I had at Wesley Seminary. His name is the Rev. Dr. Phil Wogaman – or it was the Rev. Dr. Phil Wogaman. He was my ethics professor and he was wonderful. He was a world-renowned ethics professor, author of many seminary textbooks in that field, and speaker around the world on Christian ethics. He served for a while after he retired as pastor of one of the biggest United Methodist churches in Washington DC, not too far away from the White House. I can’t tell you how highly regarded he is. But I said earlier that he used to be “**the Rev.** Dr. Phil Wogaman” because today he’s not. He’s just Dr. Phil Wogaman. Because earlier this week, during Annual Conference of the Baltimore Washington Conference, Dr. Wogaman, surrendered his clergy credentials that he’s held for 60 years, and he’s no longer a United Methodist pastor. Why? Because he could no longer remain silent about his concern about the way gay people are treated in our denomination. He had stood by and watched an incredibly gifted candidate for ministry, a woman from his church, who happens to be gay, turned down for ordination. And Dr. Wogaman could not stand by and watch what he sees as a tremendous injustice and un-Godly thing to keep happening. So he turned in his credentials and he’s no longer a clergyman.

Whether or not you agree with what he did, one thing is clear, Phil Wogaman knows the cost of discipleship today. To follow what you think God is calling you to do, sometimes costs you dearly.

Most of the time, being faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, won’t demand monumental changes like those I have mentioned, but it will cost us. Maybe it will cost us at work, because we won’t scratch and claw our way to the top at the expense of others, choosing instead to work with others and lift them up along the way. Or maybe it will cost us some friends, when we won’t participate in inappropriate activities or say things that are ungodly. It might even cost us in our relationships with family members, who don’t understand the depth of our love for Jesus, and even make jokes about it.

And, reflecting on the lesson to the rich young ruler, being faithful disciples of Christ will cost us money. Because we will realize that all that we have is a gift from God, so maybe instead of buying a latte mocha chino espresso whatever every day, we might choose instead to give money to the Costa Rica mission, for example. Or instead of having a new pair of shoes or the latest electronic gadget, we might help a child in need get some basic necessities, through Compassion International, for example. Or instead of getting a new car every few years, we will drive ours longer so that we can take that money and help somebody else.

When you’re “all in” as a disciple of Christ, it will cost you – sometimes in big ways, sometimes small. So this step – declaring your faith in Christ and joining the

church is not something, as it says in the wedding ceremony, “to be entered into unadvisedly, but reverently, discreetly, and in the fear of God.” It’s a wonderful step, of that there is no doubt, and we celebrate with you, but it is a serious step as well.

So Halle, David, Paige and Andrew – know that we are glad you’re taking it. No, **we are delighted** you’re taking this step of faith. We’re glad that you’re going “all in” with Jesus, and we want you to know we’re right there with you, walking the challenging path right beside you. And we want you to know that it’s worth it, because the path Jesus calls us to walk with him is the path to life itself – good life, real life, centered life, abundant and full life – life the way it’s meant to be.

But more important than knowing that we walk with you, remember that Jesus himself walks with you all the way, every day, every step of your life’s journey. And he will give you everything you need to be his faithful disciple, even when it costs you.

So today we celebrate you, and we celebrate with you. We are delighted that God has spoken to you in such a way that you’re willing to take this step of faith today, and enter into a life of Christian discipleship. We count it a joy and privilege to witness you making this public declaration of your faith, and consider it a wonderful birthday present for our church that you will be our newest members!

And to the rest of the congregation, I invite all of you to, in the privacy of your heart, renew your own vows and your own commitment to Christ, as these young people make theirs. Let’s all be “**all in**” for Jesus, giving him everything for the sake of the kingdom. Make it be so.

Amen.