

*Feed us, Lord, for we are hungry for Your Word. Amen.*

A few weeks ago, I heard from three different people, from different parts of my life, that they'd gotten a “follow” request from me on Instagram. But they already followed me. I feared I'd been hacked. But one of them, Karen Smith Hupp, observantly noticed that though both accounts had my same profile picture, one had a misspelling in the last name. Phew – not hacked, but spoofed. Still not good, but not as bad. I changed my passwords on that and Facebook and went about my business.

But in the text exchange that Karen and I had about it, she wrote,

“May be a sermon in this somewhere.”

And I wrote right back, “Yeah – “Are You following @RealJesus?” –

and here we are, our gospel lesson is about following Jesus.

Time to put that text thread to work.

People seem to be following vastly different Jesus', it would seem, from the controversies that go on among those who claim the title Christian.

Is Jesus the champion of the poor and oppressed, or the bringer of prosperity and power? Is he condemning judge or fierce advocate?

Is he social revolutionary or protector of capitalism and “family values?”

Well – Jesus' economic and family values don't look a lot like America's.

*“Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”*

*“None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.”*

*“If anyone comes to me and does not love me more his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters— yes, even his own life— he cannot be my disciple.”*

This may come as a shock to those who equate following Jesus with traditional family units. Jesus isn't that high on the family unit – not if those relationships stand in the way of being his disciple.

Might come as a shock to the many preachers who are making a killing off the message that God wants Christ's followers to be prosperous – not to mention those who claim that the Bible contains no mention of social justice.

Jesus looks at this crowd following him and says,

“Do you know what you’re doing here?”

Jesus doesn’t insist that anyone follow him – but if they want to, they need to put the way of the cross, the way of self-giving ministry and love of God, first. They need to choose, not vaguely drift along, doing what’s convenient.

But we don’t really like stark choices, do we? I don’t much.

And the word “Discipleship” means little to our ears. It may be the most important – and neglected – word in the Christian faith, besides “love.” But Jesus said to go out and make disciples, not church-goers or vestry members. Jesus did not say to go out and make social workers of all nations. He said, “Follow me. And if you want to be my disciple, here’s what it takes.”

Disciples are not the same thing as students, or mentees, or adherents.

Disciples take on the discipline of a teacher or master, putting that first.

They say, “Your way is the best way, I’m going to follow you, learn from you.” So a disciple enters into relationship. The benefits come from relationship. And that relationship takes priority over other relationships, other commitments.

We’re not unfamiliar with the concept of discipleship – just with the word.

A person starting out in a law firm or on Capitol Hill might become a disciple of a successful superior – and do scut work, maybe make moral compromises, slave 90-hour weeks, ignore the needs of their families and communities to please that person, to learn from them, to get the rewards of moving up. The airwaves are full of ads that promise huge financial gains to those who “order my free tape and follow my proven method for gaining wealth/losing weight /getting out of debt/overcoming your anxieties.” Someone must be ordering all those free tapes, because the ads are all over.

Perhaps we get squirrely when Jesus talks about it because he’s always reminding us that being his disciple means giving away your stuff and losing your life.

Who wants to hear that? What wants to do that?

You only do that when you trust the person asking you, when that relationship means more than the other stuff.

If we’re just coming to church and not deepening our relationship with Jesus, we’re losing out on the blessings that come along with the giving up.

How can we go deeper with Jesus, into his Way of Love? As with diet, exercise, study, anything: by being intentional about it. And by doing it in community.

Things are revving up around here, especially in the area of going deeper with God. Wednesday night bible study has started back up – join us on Zoom any week. We're starting a confirmation class for those wanting to be confirmed or received. We're preparing Godly Play classrooms and teachers for our grade-school kids, and a special program called Rite13 for our middle schoolers. Adults can learn how to Discover Your Gifts. It all starts September 18.

Want to be more intentional about reading and praying on your own?

Subscribe to *Water Daily*. Want to do something about feeding the hungry?

Help get our Community Refrigerator going, or help with the Food Pantry.

Spiritual disciplines like giving 10 percent of your income for God's work at church; reading the bible, having regular times of prayer, worship, hospitality – are the structure of a life of faith. We think of disciplines as hard work, exercise. Yet when they lead to life, we find they're worth it.

In a sense, the disciple offers herself as clay to the potter, to be remolded, reshaped into a more useful, maybe even more beautiful vessel.

That's the kind of transformation that happens as make it our priority to follow Jesus and his way of life, his Way of love.

But don't just follow Jesus, try to emulate him. Walk with him, talk with him, be with him, sit with him, do ministry with him. Church is not the goal, church is the vehicle for getting close to God and transforming the world.

That's why we're here. To connect people with the fiercely accepting love of Jesus and help them start a relationship with him. The real Jesus.

As Karen reminded me, the real Jesus won't spoof us. Or ghost us. Or flame us.

Or feed us misinformation in an echo chamber.

The real Jesus won't condemn – he will judge, but he's already taken the penalty.

The real Jesus will leave you feeling loved, more than you ever imagined.

Maybe part of the problem is that name, "Christian."

It doesn't mean much when it means so many different things to so many people – and evokes negative feelings in quite a few.

"Christian" was not the original name for Christ-followers.

They were called "People of the Way," which conveys movement, following, a road, a destination, sights to see, traveling companions.

Pilgrims on the Way of Love.

*Amen.*

**Luke 14:25-33**

Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said:

"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own life--he cannot be my disciple.

**And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.**

"Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'

"Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace.

In the same way, any of you who does not **give up** everything he has cannot be my disciple.

**Jeremiah 18:1-11**

The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: "Come, go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words." So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him.

Then the word of the Lord came to me: Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done? says the Lord. Just like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. At one moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, but if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will change my mind about the disaster that I intended to bring on it. And at another moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, but if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will change my mind about the good that I had intended to do to it. Now, therefore, say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: Thus says the Lord: Look, I am a potter shaping evil against you and devising a plan against you. Turn now, all of you from your evil way, and amend your ways and your doings.