

3rd Sunday after Pentecost – Proper 8, Year C
A Sermon Preached by The Rev Ian M Delinger
on June 29, 2025

1 Kings 19:15-16,19-21 / Psalm 16 / Galatians 5:1,13-25 / Luke 9:51-62

*Let us cry aloud to God;
We cry aloud, and God hears us.
In the day of trouble, let us seek the Lord;
Let us meditate on all God's acts
and ponder His mighty deeds.
Amen.*

The Wednesday 12.15 Service is, in a way, a bit intimidating. PLEASE don't let that put you off on coming this Wednesday! But, yes, Wednesdays can be intimidating and humbling. Each Wednesday we hear the brief biography of the person whom the Church commemorates that day. These Christians are champions of the Body of Christ who accomplished great things in the name of Jesus Christ. They range from Apostles Peter & Paul whose commemoration is actually today, friends of Jesus like Mary & Martha of Bethany who are commemorated a month from today, Christian influencers of their time like Irenaeus of Lyon, 3rd Bishop & theologian commemorated yesterday, and more modern influencers like Adelaide Teague Case who taught theology.

When we hear their lives, it's hard to see ourselves – well, let me speak for myself – it's hard to see myself accomplishing even a small fraction of what they did. What's more is what they sacrificed in order to follow Jesus in the way that they felt called to do. Let's just look at the few just mentioned:

- Mary & Martha of Bethany have probably sacrificed more in the last 1800yrs than they did in their lifetime. These sisters – one who sat at Jesus' feet and the other who feverishly worked to make sure everything was in order – have been pitted against one another in sermons for almost 2 millennia. But both, in their own unique ways, were steadfast followers of Jesus.

- Irenaeus lived in an era of active persecutions of Christians, and he himself was a martyr. But not only that, he lived in a time when the Early Church was figuring out what it meant to be a Christian: what do we believe, and what is heresy. He suffered great personal loss in his stance on what we now consider orthodoxy.
- Adelaide Teague Case was a fierce Christian educator at the Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge, Massachusetts in a time when women didn't have university degrees, and certainly didn't teach in universities. She overcame those hurdles, no doubt at great personal cost, but not in her fight for the ordination of women. The Church in the 1940s just wasn't ready to see what the Holy Spirit already knew from the time of Mary & Martha.

Every one of these persons the Church commemorates made great sacrifices in order to follow Jesus. Some were noblemen and women; some were bishops; some were lay people both rich and poor, and some were completely unknown until their devotion to following Jesus brought them into the spotlight, like our own Patron St Stephen who gets a mere 2 chapters from his first mention to his martyrdom.

My goal today is not to encourage you to live a life worthy of being commemorated by the whole Church. If you do succeed in that, 2 things: Good for you! And we'll all be long-dead by the time the Church recognizes you and your devotion to Jesus in a way that gets you into the publication known as *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*. My goal today is to encourage you in your ministry under the umbrella of the Priesthood of All Believers – that I mentioned in The Saturday Email yesterday – and to reflect on 2 questions that are 2 sides of the same coin:

- *What sacrifices have you made in your life in order to follow Jesus?*
- *What – if anything – gets in the way of you following Jesus more fully?*

Today, the church commemorates Peter & Paul – which gets bumped by Sundays always being a celebration of The Resurrection. But I want to bring Peter into

what we're doing today to get our heads around what I'm asking you to reflect on. I want to focus on one specific moment in Peter's life when he had a bit of a problem following Jesus.

For Peter, the sacrifice he made in order to follow Jesus was his livelihood as a fisherman. He and his brother Andrew gave it all up to blindly follow Jesus in His mission in the Holy Land.

But also, something got in the way of Peter fully following Jesus. On the night that Jesus was arrested, Peter denied knowing Jesus 3 times. It was a prediction made by Jesus at the Last Supper:

Then Jesus said to them, 'You will all become deserters because of me this night; for it is written, "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered." But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.' Peter said to him, 'Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you.' Jesus said to him, 'Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.' Peter said to him, 'Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.'

- Matthew 26.31-35a

And when the cock crowed, Peter was devastated: *And he went out and wept bitterly.*

What got in the way of Peter following Jesus that night? We don't know. The Gospels don't answer that question. Perhaps it was fear for his own life. But the question that you can answer is: *What gets in the way of you following Jesus more fully?*

In today's Gospel, this is what Jesus is addressing. Each person had something in their life that got in the way of following Jesus:

- The Samaritans did not receive Him for appears to be xenophobia.

- Another thought he had the muster to follow Jesus until he discovered it was a nomadic, unpredictable lifestyle.
- Two others needed more time to wrap up some family issues.

Jesus demanded more from them. The sacrifice was too much for them.

When you contemplate your faith and how you live your faith, do you ever think that Jesus asks too much of you? The Priesthood of All Believers is a fundamental Christian doctrine that is supported by scripture. The doctrine affirms that all baptized Christians – including you – share the eternal priesthood of Jesus. *The royal priesthood of the people of God consists in the offering of ourselves repeatedly in daily obedience in the world and obedient living.* What does that mean for you, and are you doing it right?

We were having a conversation about *discipleship* at Prayers & Pastries last week. We shared our thoughts on what *discipleship* is and then looked up the definition in the *Episcopal Dictionary of the Church*.

A disciple is a learner who follows a movement or teacher and helps to spread the master's teaching. The concept of discipleship (being a Christian disciple) continues to be an important part of the Christian life. For example, Dietrich Bonhoeffer [in his book] The Cost of Discipleship (1937) ... urged that grace without discipleship is "cheap grace," and that faith must be expressed in obedience.

Discipleship, then, is an elaboration of, and implementation of the Priesthood of All Believers. The Bonhoeffer reference reminds us that this is all through grace. We know that we receive grace through our faith in Jesus Christ, and we receive that grace at our Baptism. Last week as we celebrated the Feast of Corpus Christi, we were reminded that, in the Holy Sacrament of Communion:

The inward and spiritual grace is the Body and Blood of Christ given to His people, and received by faith.

Bonhoeffer is telling us that, out of respect and obedience to the Savior whom we claim to follow, we must be disciples, which means that we, as followers of the movement, must also spread *and live* the master's teaching. That's Discipleship; that's the Priesthood of All Believers.

Bonhoeffer's sacrifice in order to follow Jesus more fully was the gas chamber at a Nazi concentration camp. Bonhoeffer, a top theologian in the German Church, refused to condone what Hitler was doing, and he opposed the Nazi takeover of the German Church. With a few other prominent German theologians, they formed the Confessing Church to remain true and *remove* what was getting in the way of them following Jesus more fully, namely the cruelty of the Nazis. His sacrifice for that was his life. And indeed, Dietrich Bonhoeffer is one of the people we remember at the Wednesday Service when his name comes around.

Again, I'm not encouraging you to live a life that gets you martyred or a commemoration day in our calendar! But what gets in the way of you following Jesus more fully? What gets in the way of your discipleship and spreading and living the master's teachings?

The Anchor Bible Dictionary is a bit more forceful in its description of discipleship. It refers to the total break from the past that Jesus' followers committed to, and to the self-denial in deference to their faith in the Messiah, all in exchange for a new future in the life of Jesus. And that is a good reflection of what we heard in today's Gospel: *a total break from the past, and further self-denial*. But as scary as that may sound, being a disciple of Jesus gives you a new future. While this description of discipleship is based on the lives of the disciples in the texts of the Gospels, it is meant to apply to us, as well.

In the 1990s, courses on discipleship were a big thing. I never took one, but I knew that they were a *thing*. While such courses are still around, they are changing with the changing times. Church educators started to realize that discipleship isn't a program, it's a way of life, therefore a ministry.

Starting in a week-and-a-half, the Vestry is going to explore the ministry of *Invite-Welcome-Connect*. It states of itself:

Guided by the gospel imperative to “Go and make disciples of all nations,” the ministry of Invite Welcome Connect equips and empowers individuals and congregations to practice evangelism, hospitality, and connectedness.

I imagine that, as we explore this ministry, we will be asking ourselves and each other:

- *What sacrifices did you make in order to follow Jesus?*
- *What gets in the way of you following Jesus more fully?*

I spent a lot of time this week trying to figure out how to inspire you to reflect on these two questions – beyond the example of Dietrich Bonhoeffer going to the gas chamber – so that you could go forth from here and really wrestle with them so you don’t find yourself in the position of those in today’s Gospel. And while I couldn’t really get any further than simply asking you these 2 questions:

- *What sacrifices did you make in order to follow Jesus?*
- *What gets in the way of you following Jesus more fully?*

I kept coming back to one question that I think precedes the other 2:

What does it mean to you to follow Jesus more fully in the first place?