

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER



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DISCIPLESHIP

and the cost of following Jesus

by Drew Downs

Being a Christian in the United States is super easy. We have churches on every corner. It is the dominant religion by far. And honestly, you can get away believing whatever you want because you'll find cover for it. Heck, people don't even have to go to church at all — a cultural Christianity mixed with strains of Protestantism lets us believe without practicing — claiming that what is in our hearts is quite literally the only thing that matters.

And yet the vision of discipleship that Jesus offers in the gospels is nearly unrecognizable in this. Not because of our division or our openness, but in our general lack of sacrifice.

This isn't to say we aren't trying. We totally are. But when following Jesus is easy, are we disciples or hangers-on? How much of our faith is sacrificial? And are we able to learn what Jesus teaches? Like: what do we let go of to find eternal life?

LENT

2024

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

Life

I frequently remind us that the phrase we read in John as "eternal life" is a misnomer for the modern mind. The phrase, mixed with the evolution of theological concepts like postmillennial dispensationalism leads us to assume it has to be about Heaven, the afterlife, and a reward. But for Jesus, it is something much, much more significant.

The phrase is written in the present tense, meaning it isn't speaking of a perpetual concept into the future — it is very much about now.

With Jesus, *eternal life* is something we have *now*. It is about this life in this moment with these people around us and with this faith in God through him. Following Jesus's Way of Love means we have a *more vibrant life* than without him.

I think many of us still want to think of it as a reward for behavior or as a paradigm for obedience: a prescription for living well or "right". But Jesus keeps pushing us to see it as something we *experience*. Something that is *present*. And something that requires two things: sacrifice and other people.

Jesus is showing us what it means to be a disciple right now. How to follow him. Loving, praising, giving, letting go, forgiving, showing mercy, feeding those who hunger, praying, communing, and so much more! Living this one wild and wonderful life generously and with great hope and gratitude for everyone we encounter. Including God.

With love,
Drew

LENT

2024

FOR SUNDAY

Fifth Sunday of Lent

March 17, 2024

Collect

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

Reading

John 12:20-33

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

"Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

LENT

Reflection

They are in Jerusalem. Jesus has just come, riding on a donkey, arriving like an anti-king to much excitement and jubilation. Here is the man who has come to save them.

Let us not lose sight of who, too, comes to Jesus for saving. Not just Hebrew people, but some Greeks, too. They have come to embrace liberation from Rome's empire.

Do they know the cost of discipleship? Does anyone? That loving this world means losing it and hating it means...*keeping it forever*? This doesn't sound like a great deal, does it? Either lose everything you love or keep what you hate? But we know that isn't what Jesus is really saying.

Of course, it would be far easier for us to skip ahead, focus on the preview of the crucifixion Jesus offers, and talk about the glory of God than to talk about what Jesus is saying here. There is unity, yes. Sacrifice, of course. But also new life, following Jesus's way, letting go of other priorities.

That's what we are thinking about when Jesus speaks of glorifying God and the voice of God speaks of *being* glorified. Obviously in Jesus's self-sacrifice in the crucifixion. But this can't be read apart from the sacrifice of following Jesus – of keeping life in vibrant living.

The means of ruling or dominating in our world prevent us from living out the Kin-dom priorities of love, sacrifice, and generosity. And the keeping of the world is not holding onto the bad stuff, but caretaking the Kin-dom life of God in our world. This reversal of fortune is essential to the life of Christ and the love of God.

Eternal life (vibrant living) is not a reward for good behavior, but the actual living out of Jesus's sacrificial Way of Love. An experience of grace; of sharing grace.

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