

Seasonal Re-creation: At home and at church

Preached by

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For Reflection *"Christianity has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and not tried."*
Gilbert K. Chesterton

Hebrew Scripture Reading: *Psalm 103:13-14, 17-19, 22*

Like a parent feels compassion for their children—that's how the Lord feels compassion for those who honor him. Because God knows how we're made, God remembers we're just dust. But the Lord's faithful love is from forever ago to forever from now for those who honor God. And God's righteousness reaches to the grandchildren of those who keep the holy covenant and remember to keep God's commands. The Lord has established a throne in heaven, and reigns over all. All you who serve God and carry out God's purpose, bless the Lord! All God's creatures, bless the Lord! Everywhere, throughout the reign of God, let my whole being bless the Lord!

Gospel Reading: *Luke 9:57-62*

As Jesus and his disciples traveled along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and the birds in the sky have nests, but the Human One has no place to lay his head." Then Jesus said to someone else, "Follow me." He replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead. But you go and spread the news of God's kingdom." Someone else said to Jesus, "I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say good-bye to those in my house." Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand on the plow and looks back is fit for God's kingdom."

Meditation: *Seasonal Re-Creation: At Home and at Church*

Every time I encounter a text like this morning's reading from Luke, I think of my pastor friend who always wanted to preach a sermon series on "Things I Wish Jesus Never Said." If he preached the lectionary, sooner or later, he must have preached the series. Jesus (or the gospel writers) didn't tuck all the challenging words into a few paragraphs where they could easily be skipped. They are slipped in among other teachings we tend to find more palatable.

These words are uncomfortable for many reasons. Jesus seemed intent on discouraging people from following him rather than encouraging them. To the enthusiastic soul who pledged to follow, Jesus demanded total dependence on the hospitality of strangers. To another who pled the very important circumstance of honoring their dead, and to yet another who merely wanted to bid farewell to his family, Jesus demonstrated callous disregard for the necessities and values of daily living. It's almost as if Jesus, who at this juncture in his ministry, had turned his face toward Jerusalem and death, was interested in traveling alone. Early followers were no different than us. Then or now, we would prefer a warmer, fuzzier Jesus who has a free hand with excused absence slips and is more compliant with the expectations of society, or at least our personal convenience—until that's not what we are looking for—usually with a

preference that Jesus be discomfiting others—not us.

Yet, we have no evidence that Jesus, who fed the hungry, broke Sabbath laws so that he and his followers might eat, had compassion on the crowds, wept over his own dead and a city soon to come to grief, ate with outcasts, healed the sick, and who at the end of his life handed his mother into the care of his disciples, was unaware of or unaffected by the basic needs of life and human relationships.

What was he teaching? Certainly, he wanted to be clear that discipleship had a cost; that discipleship at its core was related to exercising discipline about the choices we make; that committing to Jesus would and should affect all the other choices we make. Just two weeks ago, two young people committed to being members of this community of faith and officers committed to beginning or continuing to lead the congregation in challenging times. Those promises affect choices they make from that day forward. We celebrate and recognize those promises in public worship in order that we all be reminded of the faithful promises we have made and choose accordingly.

As Jesus was wont to do, on that occasion he became painfully specific. His disciples (that would be us) are not treated to a poetic "Take up your cross and follow" that we can reduce to metaphor, hymn humming or the convenient inconvenient minor discomfort we relegate to scheduled seasons like Lent.

Jesus' words issue a number of challenges, albeit perhaps not the literal ones we may be thinking of: First, they remind us that the decision to follow Christ is not a one-time momentary high, important only at the baptism of our children or our own confirmations or baptisms, not only when our weddings occurs as we stand under a cross or as we bless and grieve our dead. It is a promise that has priority all the time, not just when we have the opportunity to choose between something we'd rather not do anyway and following Jesus. They remind us that Jesus has claim to the best of our lives not just the dregs we would willingly cede.

The other part is a bit more subtle, but it is there, nonetheless. We don't know—Luke doesn't tell us what the three decided—to follow or to stay behind. They would have good reason to do either. There is everything (his whole life and ministry) to suggest Jesus knew what he was demanding; that he understood to follow him involved significant sacrifice. We don't know what those three decided, but their presence in our scriptures reminds us to continually evaluate our priorities, the ones we mouth and the ones we actually hold, and to choose carefully those reasons not following, not relating, not serving.

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I can sense a certain spiritual restlessness among us right now—folks wondering why I am not preaching this in the fall instead of as we begin summer a season of recreation—especially here in the north when we can enjoy creation in ways we cannot during the rest of the year; especially this summer, when we can enjoy fuller lives as COVID apparently makes the shift from pandemic to endemic; especially when, despite the price of fuel, most of us can travel and connect with folks in ways we have not been able to for some time. Surely, she could preach this in the fall. Surely, she isn't going to tell us Jesus wants us to abandon all that opportunity for sticking around church and meeting through the summer and pretending it's like the rest of the year.

Good news! She's not going to do that! Oh, in the fall she is likely to find another text that encourages sorting priorities and making commitments, but this isn't fall. These are the opening days of a summer that has so far been lovely. Surely, there is a word from Jesus for these days. There is indeed.

Let us begin this season of recreation by remembering that another way to pronounce it and think about it is season of "re-creation"—the making new of all things as God has done with us in Christ. We do well when we use this season to find new rhythms for living, and relating, shifting diets and exercise, gardening, growing, reading, walking on the beach, climbing mountains, spending time in or on the water, unions and reunions, restoring our spirits in ways that have nothing to do with church programming and everything to do with the gifts God has bestowed on us. It is a season for our re-creation with great occasion for reconnecting with the creation of which we are an interwoven part.

But Jesus would remind us that we have also been dreaming about the re-creation of our life together as a people of faith—a life that has been buffeted, not only by a pandemic, but the ever-more rapidly changing culture and circumstances in which we live. While we are not called to turn away from the personal recreation of the season, re-creation, we are called to attend to God’s vision in Christ for our ministry and how that re-creation might happen. While there is lots of good news in our faith and even in this sermon, there is also bad news—and here it is: We have no elves and no wands. We will not return in the fall and discover that somehow magically there is full blown programming ready to run on the Sunday after Labor Day.

In this season of re-creation, we are not called to weekly or monthly meetings, study groups and fellowship groups or even the regular Sunday worship attendance most of us manage to achieve during the programming year. We are called to continue dreaming and engaging in conversation about ideas and possibilities—for what our re-created life might look like and how to make it happen. We are called to consider the ideas and visions folk have offered and are shared in the weekly email. We are called to share our own visions, ideas and gifts. We are called to pray, reflect and consider—not what others ought to be doing, but what we have to offer and how our gifts might be put to use. Who knows? We might even discover gifts we haven’t used before ever—or in the service of our Lord that would help us all do a new thing. We are called to prioritize what our own commitments and choices will be with regard to our life of faith in community. We are called to be open to change, not slap-dash painters trying to cover the cracks and weaknesses of visions that served in their time, but do not serve in ours.

In this season of re-creation at home, let it also be a season of re-creation for us in this community of faith. For us there is good news! Our security is not in what we might cling to from the past and keep unchanged. Our security is in our God who breathed us into being in the first place and who has made us new creations in Christ. Our security is in the One who is always doing a new thing—even in us, with us and through us. Our security is in the One who walks with us now and leads us to a new day.

Prayers for Others and Ourselves

Gracious and loving God: We fold ourselves before you in prayer, opening our Spirits wide so that you might move freely through our hearts and minds.

We pray for the places where war and terrorism reign, the ones where the displaced number in the millions; the ones who seek to make room and the ones who need room...

We pray for the places where ignorance and fear reign, especially those places where people are denied rights, or dignity or life or education, because while created in your image, they reflect a different aspect of your being than those around them...

We pray for the places where the forces of nature have reigned over destruction of life, property and the planet, as the planet makes its suffering known in floods and wildfires, violent storms and drought ...

On this day when we express our gratitude for the men who have nurtured us – to whom we are bound by blood, marriage, adoption, faith, education, friendship and collegiality, we pray for the ones we know and the ones we don’t – who care, who educate, who heal, who bring joy and encouragement, discipline and challenge – that as they have striven to help us become the best people we can be, that they might find all those things for themselves and grow fully, happily and with joy, not just because of all that they have given away, but all that they might receive.

Most holy God: We pray for others and ourselves that the day, which is already dawning, the day when your vision and purposes reign might soon fill the days with light and the nights with hope in every place. In Christ’s name we pray, as he taught us...

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

**Thy kingdom come, thy will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.**

Give us this day, our daily bread.

**Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors
and lead us not into temptation,**

but deliver us from evil,

for thine is the kingdom and the power

and the glory forever. Amen.