

Come and follow me

Sermon for Sunday, March 28, 2010 Palm Sunday
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Luke 9:23

Among all the junk mail we all get, do you recall the flyer or postcard for the Ultramatic mattress, the one endorsed by “television personality Gordie Tapp”? This is the mattress where you can raise the head or the knees, or do just about anything you want with it. Plus, if you buy it, they’ll give you a free 23” television.

Did you notice that they don’t mention the price on the flyer? You have to phone the 800 number to get more information. And when you phone, you have to listen to a long spiel about how wonderful it is, and about how it will change your life for the better, before they tell you the price.

This is a common tactic among sales people who are afraid of scaring off their prospective customers before they’ve had a chance to hear the pitch.

I’m not going to do that. I’m going to tell you the deal right up front. I’m not hiding anything. There’s no small print.

The deal is very simple. As I said to the children, we thank Jesus for giving his life for us on the cross, and we give our lives to Jesus. We belong to him.

I’m going to pass on to you the invitation which Jesus gives to those who want to become his disciples, which simply means his followers.

Luke 9:23, Today’s English Version:
[Jesus said], “If you want to come with me, you must forget yourself, take up your cross every day, and follow me.

In that passage Jesus lists three things:

- Forget yourself. In other words, we deny our selves: our self-centredness, our desires to always have more and more, to be number one.
- Take up your cross daily. In other words, start each day by committing your life to Jesus Christ. If and when you suffer persecution or hardship because of your obedience to Jesus, accept that as part of the deal.
- Follow him. In other words, follow the leader. Jesus becomes Number One in our lives; he is Lord over everything. Our priorities change, the way we spend our time and our money change.

To me, in a nutshell, that’s what it means to be a Christian. Jesus died for us; we live for him.

Some people like the first part of that deal (“Jesus died for me”), but they don’t like the second part (“we live for him”).

William Willimon, a chaplain at Duke University in the US, tells of receiving a phone call one day from a very irate father. The man was angry because his graduate school-bound daughter had decided to (in his words) “throw it all away and go and do mission work in Haiti with the Presbyterian Church.”

The father screamed, “Isn’t that absurd! She has a B.Sc. degree from Duke, and she is going to dig ditches in Haiti! I hold you personally responsible for this!” Willimon said, “Why me?” The father said, “You ingratiated yourself and filled her mind with all this religion stuff.”

Will Willimon is not easily intimidated. He asked the father: “Sir, weren’t you the one who had her baptized?”

“Well, well, well, yes.”

“And didn’t you take her to Sunday School when she was a little girl?”

“Well, well, yes.”

“And didn’t you allow your daughter to go on those youth group ski trips to Colorado when she was in high school?”

“Yes . . . what does that have to do with anything?”

“Sir, you’re the reason she’s throwing it all away. You introduced her to Jesus. Not me!”

“But,” moaned the father, “all we wanted was a Presbyterian.”

Willimon replied, “Well, sorry, sir, you messed up. You’ve gone and made her into a disciple of Jesus!”

Yes, my friends, Jesus is calling us to be more than simply Presbyterians (or United Church goers, or whatever). He wants our lives, and nothing less.

An African pastor was overpowered by rebels who demanded that he renounce his faith. He refused. The night before the rebels took his life, the pastor wrote the following lines on a scrap of paper:

**I am part of the “Fellowship of the Unashamed.”
I have Holy Spirit power. The die has been cast.**

I've stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I am a disciple of His. I won't look back, let up, slow down, back away, or be still. My past is redeemed, my present makes sense, and my future is secure. I am finished and done with low living, sight walking, small planning, smooth knees, colourless dreams, tame visions, mundane talking, chintzy giving, and dwarfed goals!

I no longer need pre-eminence, prosperity, position, promotions, plaudits, or popularity. I don't have to be right, first, tops, recognized, praised, regarded, or rewarded. I now live by presence, lean by faith, love by patience, lift by prayer, and labour by power.

My face is set, my gait is fast, my goal is heaven, my road is narrow, my way is rough, my companions few, my Guide reliable, my mission clear. I cannot be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, diluted, or delayed. I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of adversity, negotiate at the table of the enemy, ponder at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity.

I won't give up, shut up, let up, or burn up till I've preached up, prayed up, paid up, stored up, and stayed up for the cause of Christ.

I am a disciple of Jesus. I must go till He comes, give till I drop, preach till all know, and work till He stops.

And when He comes to get His own, He'll have no problems recognizing me. My colours will be clear.

Today, Palm Sunday, we cheer Jesus as he marches into Jerusalem. But Jesus doesn't care about our shouts from the stands. He calls for us to get up and follow him, as he marches to the cross, and beyond that to eternal life.

Will you follow him? Will you commit yourself to be a whole-hearted follower of Jesus?

<p><i>Theme for today:</i> "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." – Jim Elliot, a missionary martyred in a jungle in South America.</p>
