THE LIVING WORD OF THE SEASON AFTER PENTECOST

A DEVOTIONAL GUIDE September 4 - September 10

SEASON AFTER PENTECOST

Proper 18

There are places in Scripture where following Jesus sounds like a relief from the weariness and heavy burdens of life. Matthew 11:28-30 comes to mind.

And then there are passages like our Gospel text for Sunday, Luke 14:25-33, where the cost of discipleship to Jesus feels heavy and costly.

In Luke 14:27, Jesus says, "And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." Then He says, "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it?" (v. 28). And finally, in verse 33, He says, "In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples."

Carry your cross. Count the cost. Give up everything.

The German resistor and pastor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, wrote a classic Christian manifesto called *The Cost of Discipleship*. He contrasts cheap grace, which costs nothing to the disciple, with costly grace. He writes, "Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life."

There is a cost in following Jesus. It is not a *price* to earn salvation, but rather the logical implication of abandoning oneself to a life tracking His footsteps. His feet are headed toward the cross, having calculated what obedience would cost Him. King Jesus had already given up everything when He left heaven to become poor on earth.

Jesus did it all for you, to give His life to rescue us from the empty ways of this world. And now, He offers a choice. Will you follow Him wherever He leads? You will have to forego selfish pursuits to follow the Master.

But in that path, you will find life. This week's reading in Matthew 10 reinforces this: "Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it."

As you read the Scriptures this week, pay attention to the *choices* that are held out to those who choose to follow God.

Psalm 139 assures you that God sees and knows you. Find comfort in those truths as you walk the hard path of discipleship.

As you read the many selections from Jeremiah, pay attention to Jeremiah 18:6, where the Lord says, "Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter does?" declares the Lord. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel." Allow this word to encourage you to be pliable in the Master's hands. Jeremiah's readings will call us away from being a stiffnecked people to radical allegiance to the Lord.

Hear the call of a decisive choice in Deuteronomy 30:15-20, "See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them..."

Consider carefully your path in Psalm 1, "Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night."

As you read Psalm 2, ponder the foolishness of rebellion against the Lord, where the wicked say, "Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles." The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them."

As you approach Philemon 1:1-21, reflect on the radical cost of 1st-century obedience for a slaveholder who is being called away from the way of the world. He is told to receive a runaway slave "no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord. So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me."

These simple words will serve to undermine the institutions that enslaved people. People are not humans to be enslaved, but brothers and sisters who are to be welcomed and loved. The Gospel changes everything.

Paul gives radical instructions to his mentee Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:6-16, "Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers."

The choice of following Jesus is yours. Yes, there is life in following Jesus, but the path is treacherous. Consider the call and the cost carefully. The Lord is with you.

FOR PRAYER & REFLECTION

Sometimes I find it helpful to read a passage of Scripture in more than one translation. Consider Psalm 1:1 this way:

Psalm 1:1 NIV

Blessed is the one who does not walk in \ Oh, the joys of those who do not follow step with the wicked or stand in the way | the advice of the wicked, or stand around that sinners take or sit in the company | with sinners, or join in with mockers. of mockers.

Psalm 1:1 NLT

Do you see the trajectory this person is on and how it reveals what not to do versus what to do? Can you feel the contrast in blessing and joys versus wickedness and mockery? Notice how this person started off walking in step with the wicked and following their advice. Then, they slowed down to stand in the path sinners take. Finally, they sat down in the company of mockers and joined in the discussion.

It is important to note that this is not about having friends who do not know Jesus. In fact, our lives are meant to be a testament to those who do not know Him. Our prayer should be that friends will one day come to say YES to Jesus because they have seen, in and through us, what it looks like to be an apprentice of Jesus and to do as verse 2 states: "delight in the law of the Lord, meditating on it day and night."

Verse 1 is describing a person on a trajectory away from God. They are intentionally walking away from blessings, ignoring His Word, and disregarding His promptings.

Is it time to consider your own trajectory? Invite the Holy Spirit to gently reveal anything that may need highlighting.

- Is there anyone you are "walking in step with" or "following the advice of" that would cause a trusted friend or family member to be concerned?
- Is there anyone you are standing around with who is engaged in activities you would be embarrassed if others knew about? (Imagine it being revealed on social media or in print.)
- Is there anywhere you are joining in mocking people? Think about the diversity of ethnicity, gender, religious choices, or lack thereof, etc. Are your words building others up or tearing them down?

As you reflect on your present trajectory, consider this invitation from Jeremiah 6:16 (NIV). This is what the Lord says:

Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But you said, 'We will not walk in it.""

The truth is, we choose our own trajectory. Are you ready to find rest for your soul? Turn to Jesus.



SCRIPTURE

READINGS FOR THE WEEK

Thursday

Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18; Jeremiah 15:10-21; Philippians 2:25-30

Friday

Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18; Jeremiah 16:14-17:4; Colossians 4:7-17

Saturday

Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18; Jeremiah 17:14-27; Matthew 10:34-42

Sunday

Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18; Jeremiah 18:1-11; Deut. 30:15-20;

Psalm 1; Philemon 1:1-21; Luke 14:25-33

Monday

Psalm 2; Jeremiah 18:12-23; 1 Timothy 3:14-4:5

Tuesday

Psalm 2; Jeremiah 19:1-15; 1 Timothy 4:6-16

Wednesday

Psalm 2; Jeremiah 20:1-18; Luke 18:18-30

Why do the daily readings begin on Thursday?

The daily readings for each week begin on Thursday and end on the following Wednesday. The Thursday through Saturday readings prepare the reader for the Sunday ahead. The Monday through Wednesday readings reflect on what was presented on Sunday.

The Morning Liturgy

Opening Scripture

I was glad when they said unto me, "We will go into the house of the Lord."

Psalm 122:1

Opening Prayer (based on Psalm 51)

Open my lips, O Lord, and my mouth shall proclaim Your praise. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Your presence, and take not Your Holy Spirit from me. Give me the joy of Your saving help again and sustain me with Your bountiful Spirit. Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. *Amen*.

Scripture Reading (read Psalm and Gospel text here)

Period of Silence

Confessing Our Faith (Apostles' Creed)

The Lord's Prayer

The Collect (Proper 18)

Grant us, O Lord, to trust in You with all our hearts; for, as You always resist the proud who confide in their own strength, so You never forsake those who make their boast of Your mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

A Midday Prayer

Blessed Savior, at this hour you hung upon the cross, stretching out your loving arms: Grant that all the peoples of the earth may look to you and be saved; for your mercies' sake. *Amen*.

An Early Evening Prayer

Lord Jesus, stay with us, for evening is at hand and the day is past; be our companion in the way, kindle our hearts, and awaken hope, that we may know you as you are revealed in Scripture and the breaking of bread. Grant this for the sake of your love. *Amen*.

A Bedtime Confession and Prayer

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name.

Amen.

Visit this place, O Lord, and drive far from it all snares of the enemy; let Your holy angels dwell with us to preserve us in peace; and let Your blessing be upon us always; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



