

Trust in the Lord with all Your Heart

A sermon by the Rev. Susan Bek
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May the words of my mouth, the signs from our hands, and the meditations of all our hearts be always acceptable to you O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Today we continue our study of the Gospel of Luke.

Luke teaches us about this child who grows into a kind and gentle Jesus. He is portrayed so nicely, that a reading of Luke often leaves people wondering, “how could they have crucified this kind, gentle and wonderful man?”

Today's gospel gives us one of the many reasons why he was seen as such a threat. He turned everything upside down. He threatened their very way of life. The first shall be last and the last shall be first is a wonderful message if you're last on the social ladder. To those who stood at the top, these were fighting words!

Last week we heard him say that you should always take the lower place at the banquet table in case someone more important than you is invited – imagine how that is heard by people who are certain that no one is more important than they are. And who did Jesus say should be invited to the banquet? The blind, the lame, the poor, those who could not repay you. How could they ever be seen as important?

Today he attacks the social structure of his time which was based on kinship; the importance of family. Come to think of it, why was this oldest son out on a preaching tour rather than helping to run the family business? It seems that he did not come to bring peace; to uphold the status quo. He came with a sword that would divide households and reorder everything.

In today's sermon we will explore this week's scripture lessons . We'll consider the very strong and challenging words we heard Jesus say and ask, **What does it take to be a disciple, a true follower of Jesus?**

Let's start at the beginning. Our service starts with a special prayer called The collect. It's meant to give us something to focus on as we make our way through the service, a theme for the day. We prayed, "Grant us, O lord, to trust in you with all our hearts..." Today we're going to try to stay focused on this – **trusting in the Lord with all our hearts.**

For us, the reference to our hearts brings up connections with emotion and behavior. In Biblical times, the gut was the seat of emotion. The heart was the seat of intellect and reason. I'd like to suggest that we include all of those, let's include all that we have, are and can do, with all of it let us trust in the Lord.

The lesson from Deuteronomy asked the same thing – for us to **trust in the Lord with all our hearts.** Moses is coaching the people who are about to cross over into the Promised Land. He tells them that they have a choice – life & prosperity or death & adversity. To choose life means walking in the Lord's ways. To choose death means turning away from God, being led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them.

What did Moses suggest? Choose life – obey God and hold fast to him. **Trust in the Lord with all your heart.**

Psalm today says to stay away from wicked and sinful people and, instead, to **Trust in the Lord with all their hearts.** The faithful are like trees planted by streams of water – their roots reach down and find the nourishment they need to stay strong and not wither. The wicked are not like these strong trees with their deep roots. They are like the chaff which the wind blows away.

Our Second Reading today is one of the shortest books in the Bible. It's Paul's letter to Philemon, and today we read all but the last 4 sentences of this book. If you'd like to feel accomplished, having read an entire book of the bible while in church today, open up your bible and read those last 4 sentences.

In this letter, Paul asks Philemon to turn away from what he would usually do. He asks him, instead, **to trust the Lord with all his heart**, and be willing to do something in a very different way. What did Paul ask Philemon to do? He asked him to forgive the slave Onesimus for running away. The punishment he deserved from a worldly perspective was

death, but Paul asked that, instead of punishing him, Philemon do a very challenging thing – that he forgive him and welcome him, not as a slave, but as a brother. What would it take for Philemon to have such a huge change of heart? He'd have to **trust in the Lord with all his heart.**

Which brings us to this morning's Gospel lesson. We're in chapter 14 of Luke.

Jesus has turned his face toward Jerusalem; he is making his way to the place where he knows he will sacrifice everything. Here we are, in the midst of that journey and tensions are high; time is short; things are heating up. And in this context, Jesus addresses an important question. **What does it take to be a disciple, a true follower of Jesus?** Jesus' answer was not a gentle one. Way back then, and still today, these words are hard to hear.

"Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. ...none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions."

Jesus was challenging the people to face up to the harsh realities of what was about to happen. Since we've committed to keeping our focus on **trusting the Lord with all our hearts**, I'm not going to avoid the topic or distract you away from this lesson. Let's face it head on. Let's **trust in the Lord with all our hearts.**

Jesus said, *"Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple."*

This is a harsh message, especially when you read it in English. In the original Greek, the word that we hear translated as "hate" actually means "to turn away from." We aren't called to loath or despise our family in order to follow Christ, but rather that we must be willing to turn away, if necessary, even from our family if that's what Jesus calls us to do. We must **trust in the Lord with all our hearts.**

Next, Jesus said, *“Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”* It is likely that this meant something very different to those who first heard it. To them, carrying your cross meant walking the road to your own execution. Crucifixion was the punishment for insurrection, for rising up against the authority of Rome.

It means something very different to us today, not only because we live in a completely different context, but because we have the lens of his crucifixion and resurrection through which to understand these words. Today, the idea that we should carry the cross and follow Jesus means that we should be willing to endure the burdens and fulfill the obligations of a life in Christ. It means that we **trust in the Lord with all our heart.**

Finally, Jesus said, *“...none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.”*

We must be willing to give for the sake of God’s work in the world. It’s important that we control our possessions and use them for good rather than allowing them to control us and hold us back from dedicating ourselves wholly to following Christ. We each must decide. Will we **trust** in money, in wealth and status? Or will we **trust in the Lord with all our heart.**

Think about it. When each of us faces the end of our life, we will all have to turn away from everything in order to follow Jesus. Jesus challenges us to get ready and to be fully committed to **trust that he is with us**, even now. He lived as one of us. He experienced and overcame the toughest human challenges; childhood, poverty, oppression, torture and even death. In order to follow Jesus, we must one day sacrifice everything. No one can claim the gift of

everlasting life without first letting go, turning way from our families, all of our possessions and, yes, our very lives. In the end, we must trust in the Lord with all our hearts.

Being a disciple, a member of the Jesus Movement, is not an easy calling and it's not to be taken lightly. In order to follow him, we may be called make sacrifices. We'll be called to see the world as God sees it, love as God loves, sacrifice as Jesus sacrifices and accept even the most unworthy people as beloved children of God.

What it all seems to boil down to is trust, trust in the Lord with all your heart. It is the Lord who created us and knit us together in our mothers' wombs. Because of God's marvelous works, we are wonderfully made. All that we have, all that we are, and all the we can do come from God. And it is safe to entrust to God those whom we love because God loves our fathers, mothers, spouses, children and our brothers and sisters. We can trust in the Lord with all our hearts and present ourselves as a living sacrifice utterly dedicated to the Lord.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.