



St John Lutheran Church

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Matthew 10:34-42

"WHOEVER LOSES HIS LIFE FOR MY SAKE"

It is doubtful that many people realize what they're really getting into when they heed the call to follow Christ. **When the Holy Spirit** called you by the Gospel... **did you** know all that the Christian life would entail? **Obviously none of us** could as so many of us were baptized as babies. **For what God** has in mind for His children is... **as the Bible** says, far above anything that we could ever ask or think. **And that especially** holds true when it comes to the matter that is discussed in today's text... **the matter of cross-bearing.**

Jesus says, "Anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." Jesus explains what some of the consequences are of being one of His followers. **He indicates that** it will result in strife and division. **He says that** it is quite likely that, in taking up our cross to follow Him... **we will** end up being alienated from some of the people whom we love the dearest... **even members** of our own families.

Perhaps that's a fact that hits very close to your own heart and home today. **Some of you** know what it's like to have spouse or children, brothers or sisters, or parents... **who ridicule** you for your beliefs and for your presence here in this church. **And some of** that ridicule is painful at times... and **it** is then that we can second-guess whether or not it's all really worth it. **Did we know** that would happen when we were called to faith? **Probably not. And does division** fit the pattern of all that Christianity is all about? **Again, for many people,** such talk seems to be totally out of place. **How can you** talk about Christianity and separation in the same breath? **Shouldn't we over** look the minor stuff and look at what we do agree on?? **Shouldn't we all** get along??

There are many who have this stereotyped image of Christianity... **that it is** all about love and tolerance and respect for one another's beliefs. **But Jesus completely** destroys that notion with the opening words of the Gospel reading today when He says, **"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn "'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law-- a man's enemies will be the members of his own household."**

Some very sincere, loving, outspoken Christians, however... **will never** be able to abide by those words. **They will dismiss** them from their minds. **They will pretend** that those words were never spoken by Jesus. **For they** believe in a Christian religion that seeks to preserve peace and harmony at all costs. **And they echo** the words of that religious folk song of the sixties which proclaimed, **"And they'll know we are Christians by our love,"** which included the verse which said, **"and we'll guard each man's dignity and save each man's pride...."** even if such dignity and pride is at odds with what God Himself teaches!

Is that what Christianity is all about? **Guarding our dignity** and saving our pride? **Isn't it on** account of those very things that our Savior had to die... **to free** us from those kinds of self-centered concerns? **Isn't true Christianity** rather about God redeeming those who had broken the very first commandment **by placing their fear, love, and trust in themselves** rather than in God? **And that this** area where we all still run the risk of

losing our souls... **when we** strive to protect and coddle our own lives with all of its personal rights and privileges?

"Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." It's quite a different religious philosophy, to say the least. **The option that** Jesus sets before us is one which, perhaps, we did not bargain for... **nor do** we yet grasp its full significance. **True Christianity is all** about bearing the cross.

What does that mean, exactly... **to bear** a cross? **It's really** another term for self-denial. **Putting someone else's** wants and needs first! **You see, in Jesus'** day, the occasion upon which a person was forced to bear a cross was when they were carrying their own means of execution... **as when** Jesus bore His cross to Calvary. **But more than** that, bearing the cross ultimately meant that you surrendered yourself completely as you were forcefully pinned to that wooden cross by the nails which were driven through your flesh. **Needless to say... on the cross... Jesus gave** up all personal rights and privileges. **They were stripped** away from Him along with the very clothes that He was wearing. **He was... at** that time, totally at the mercy of the soldiers who nailed Him to that cross. **But, most of** all, He was at the mercy of His Father, Whose will it was that He should die in the first place. **The worlds need** to be saved from sin was more important than anything else to Christ! **His personal wants** and needs became secondary.

So, to bear a cross really means relinquishing any personal opinions, preferences, wants, or demands. **It means that** we are to be totally sacrificial, just as Christ made Himself a sacrifice on the cross. **TOTAL sacrifice.**

But none of us really knows what that means. **No one here** has ever sacrificed themselves... **totally. Sure, we can** point to many instances where we have given of ourselves over and over again until we feel like we have nothing left to give. **We have offered** ourselves and our resources to others... **perhaps receiving** no thanks in return. **But, in every** instance, there has been a limit to that sacrifice. **There is a** time when we say to ourselves, **"Enough is enough."** **And in a** moment of self-preservation, we tell ourselves, **"I have to think about myself too."** **Ultimately we end** up becoming selfish so that our own self needs are preserved!

That might sound quite reasonable to us. **But is that** what Christ meant? **Did the Lord** include a loophole in the whole cross-bearing idea? **Does God ever** say, **"Oh, it's O.K. I really didn't mean that you had to be completely self-sacrificial!"** **Did God ever** say that? **No! God really** does mean for us to deny ourselves and to quit insisting our preserving our dignity and pride and arguing that there is a limit to how much God can realistically expect of us.

But that's such a difficult thing for us to do. **Because we fear** things like forgiving unconditionally when we are sinned against. **We fear going** about our work meekly and humbly for we cannot bear the thought of not being recognized for our efforts. **We fear giving** too much out of our pockets to the Lord because we have come to believe that non-Scriptural adage that God only helps those who help themselves.

And that fear will continue to plague us, people... **just as long** as we believe that who we are by name... **by our** status... **by our** social acceptance... **or by** our money... **is mark** of our true identity. **But, to view** ourselves in such a self-consuming manner is, quite frankly... **sinful. And listen to** the words of today's Epistle, **"We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."**

You have a new life. **A new identity. It was given** to you in Holy Baptism. **That's where Christ** came to live in you so that, as St. Paul wrote, **"It is no longer I who live, but Christ Who lives in me."** **Your former self** is dead. **Stop trying to** revive it through self-preservation**and, instead,** let us present ourselves as a living

sacrifice to our Lord for we have absolutely nothing to lose. **For just as** Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father... **we too**, are assured of a new life!

"So, If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either." Granted, it is not a popular position to take. **Others will look upon us as if we were complete fools to let others "take advantage of us,"** as they see it. **They will think us senseless to give of ourselves so freely and so charitably as if we're simply throwing our resources away.**

But we know better. We may not have fully realized it at the start when we were called to follow Christ but... **little by little**, the Holy Spirit is teaching us *that this is what it means to be one of Jesus' own disciples.* **In the words of a hymn from the fifteen-forties we proclaim, "And take they our life, goods, fame, child, and wife, Let these all be gone, They yet have nothing won; the Kingdom ours remaineth."**

No, it is not always easy to be a Christian... **especially when** human pride and reason gets in the way and tries to take over. **But it was this** reason that Christ presented Himself as a sacrifice to God the Father... **a complete sacrifice... a total sacrifice. Jesus had to** do that for us because God... **is completely** uncompromising when it comes to His will for us. **And in God's** holy and just mind... **there is** no such thing as being tolerant of sin, of misbelief, or of preserving harmony at the expense of disregarding His Word and His Teaching! **Anything short of** perfect obedience is punishable by everlasting death.

But God showed His mercy toward us by punishing His own Son in our stead. **God willingly paid** the price of His Son's life for our salvation... **in order that** Jesus' **Life might be your own true life.** **"Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."** And so...we love others first...we seek their good first....**and in so doing we show that we gladly take up the cross. In the Name of the Father and of the Son + and the Holy Spirit...Amen**

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