

Date: August 30, 2026 (Pentecost 14)

1. Texts: Exodus 3:1-15; Ps. 105:1-6, 23-26, 45c; Romans 12:9-21; Matthew 16:21-28.
2. Subject: discipleship.
3. Topic: the cost of genuine discipleship.
4. Aim: guide.
5. Proposition: "There is a price to be paid for following Jesus."

THE COST OF OUR DISCIPLESHIP

Last week we heard Peter's grand confession of Jesus as Lord and Saviour. This week, reading from the same chapter of Matthew's Gospel, we heard Jesus rebuke Peter, calling him God's adversary. That's a huge, powerful contrast. But it is also proof positive of Jesus' identity. This contrast between "Blessed are you" and "Get behind me, Satan" shouts at us, demanding we recognize the extravagant and costly love of God. It demands that we recognize the cost of following Jesus.

So, last week Jesus praised Peter. Peter had been open to the revelation by the Holy Spirit. Peter proclaimed before the disciples that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

This week, from the same chapter, Jesus also proclaimed that the Messiah must suffer and die. It is only through such suffering and death that humanity's salvation can be achieved. Peter strongly objected to this. For this, Jesus called him Satan, God's adversary.

This contrast proclaims the cost to Jesus of being the Messiah. Being the Messiah means following God's will. Following God's will leads to persecution by the world. In Jesus' case that would mean suffering and death. To be the Messiah will mean to suffer and die.

Now comes the uncomfortable part. To be a disciple of Jesus means following his will. Following the will of Christ will lead to persecution by the world. In our case it may well mean suffering, although not likely death. To be a Christian will mean to follow God's will and to suffer the consequences of that.

So, what is the will of God for which we might suffer? That's no mystery or secret.

“ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”¹

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.²

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”³

The will of Christ is that we love others and demonstrate that love through our sacrifices. That demonstration, in both word and deed, will recruit more disciples.

Of course, if you want more clarity about how to love others, the reading from Paul's epistle to the Romans gives very practical guidelines.

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not

¹ Matthew 22:37-40.

² John 15:12-13.

³ Matthew 28:18-20.

repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.⁴

Such is the clear command of God. It is not mysterious or difficult to learn. It certainly isn't always easy to do, but knowing what God expects from us as Christ's disciples is clear and direct.

But now comes the most difficult part of this sermon. We have to somehow discover the motivation to live as Christ's disciples. We know all about loving God and our neighbour. We know that we are to make sacrifices for the sake of others, as an expression of God's love working through us. We can actually make opportunities to do a selection of that long list from Romans. But where is our motivation, our drive to do as Jesus asks?

We'll have to find it from within ourselves. Motivation imposed from outside is only obedience and obligation. Like dieting and exercise, it will not last well and your goals may not be achieved long-term. The drive, the commitment to the will of God, must come from within.

I think that commitment may arise from our experience of the love of God. That is, having experienced God's own sacrifice of love, we can make the commitment to act out of that love for the sake of others. God gave himself for our sakes. We can give ourselves to others for his sake. We do that through our commitment to those commands of Christ. We figure out what to do with those suggestions of St. Paul. But our commitment to this process must arise from within, from inside our relationship of love and trust in God. Having been loved, we can love in turn and act out of that love.

⁴ Romans 12:9-21.

Peter proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus paid the cost of being the Messiah. We must pay the cost of being his disciples, and we know what that cost is. It is the cost of our genuine discipleship.

AMEN.