

Mother Lynn Finnegan  
Church of the Holy Faith  
Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
Proper 18  
Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Philemon 1-21;  
Luke 14:25-33  
September 8, 2025

### Jumping into the Deep End

Does anyone else get the impression that Jesus was just a wee bit tired of being around crowds? And that perhaps his speech writer was off on a break somewhere? Jesus has just been, as we heard in last week's gospel lesson, dining with Pharisees for the sabbath. Instead of enjoying a relaxing meal with sacred prayers, he finds himself confronting their hypocrisy and reprimanding them for their exaggerated sense of self-importance.

And now, Jesus continues on his journey to Jerusalem, where he will die. Large crowds are traveling with him, excited followers who have been amazed by Jesus' power over demons, diseases, and disabilities. If Jesus had been a good church programmer, he would have dispatched his apostles to gather names and addresses. He would have made sure everyone felt welcome and that there were plenty of cookies to go around. He would have stuck to miracles and uplifting stories. But that isn't what Jesus does. Instead he tells them three shocking things: 1. 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; 2. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple; and 3. None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions. Well. Talk about a buzz kill.

I don't think, though, that Jesus was tired. I don't think he, in a fit of frustration, went off script. Jesus doesn't care about his average Sunday attendance. He cares about disciples. Jesus' words are not words of annoyance, but of love. They are not words of rejection, but of compassion. They are words of truth spoken by someone who desires a deep and intimate relationship with every single person in that crowd. In order to do that, though, he needs to be honest. He wants them, and us, to know the truth. There is a cost to discipleship. "It is well known," theologian Søren Kierkegaard wrote, "that Christ consistently used the expression 'follower.' He never asks for admirers, worshippers, or adherents. No, he calls disciples. It is not adherents of a teaching but followers of a life Christ is looking for. . . His whole life on earth, from beginning to end, was destined solely to have followers and to make admirers impossible."<sup>1</sup>

I am guessing you are familiar with the following scene – either from a movie, or with your children, or perhaps even yourself. You may have experienced it just this summer. It is the swimming pool diving board scene. A child musters up enough courage to jump off the high dive. As he or she is climbing that ladder, though, a little doubt seeps in. And then, walking out to the end and taking a few cautious bounces, the doubts get bigger, and the water looks farther away. The lifeguard is looking. The kids waiting their turn at the bottom of the steps are getting restless. The parents are treading water in the deep end, shouting encouragement and love. And the child on the diving board walks to the end of the board, and then maybe back again, several times, calculating the risk of jumping. Maybe today he or she will be a risktaker, maybe not.

"Disciple" is one of those churchy words we don't use too often in everyday speech, but what it essentially means is being a risktaker. Being a disciple is a risk. Following Jesus means we take risks.

---

<sup>1</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren. "*Followers, Not Admirers*," in Bread and Wine: Readings for Lent and Easter, (Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY, 2003), p. 55

Following Jesus means we do things that are uncomfortable and challenging. Following Jesus means jumping into the deep end when we are petrified and unsure of whether we can even swim.

We know Jesus well enough to know that he is not advocating for family hatred. Matthew's gospel has a milder admonition: Jesus says those who love family members more than they love him are not worthy of him. Jesus uses hyperbole intended to get the crowd's attention, but it isn't idle hyperbole: Jesus doesn't sugarcoat discipleship. Discipleship isn't just one more hobby or an extracurricular activity. A decision to come to church can perhaps be made quickly. A decision to donate to feed the hungry, or speak a word of kindness, or even forgive a friend can also perhaps be made relatively quickly. Being a disciple, though, is a long-term risk-taking commitment. Elsewhere in Luke's gospel, Jesus tells his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross *daily* and follow me."<sup>2</sup> To become Jesus' follower means our love, our loyalty, and our priority resides with Jesus over *all* people and things that we hold dear. We affirm this desire in the words of the Eucharistic prayer we will soon pray: "we earnestly desire thy fatherly goodness to accept this our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, whereby we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, our selves, our souls and bodies."

What does this discipleship look like in our lives? It affects everything: how we spend our money, how we spend our time, how we interact with one another, and how we care for ourselves. Of course, faithful discipleship is not easy. It takes discernment. It takes persistence. It takes trust. It takes God's grace. I have been at the end of that diving board, both literally and metaphorically, and I have experienced the absolute exhilaration that comes with the decision to jump in, to take the risk of following Jesus and placing him above all other things in my life. It is truly life-giving and amazing! I have also been on that board and backed off, climbed back down the stairs, and sat defiantly on the side of the pool, refusing

---

<sup>2</sup> Luke 9:23

God's invitation to a life in Christ. And I suspect I will continue to do both the rest of my life. Being risktakers and answering Jesus' challenge to be his disciples, doesn't mean we have no doubts, fears, hesitations or downright obstinance. Being a disciple doesn't mean we have it all figured out. It does mean, though, that we commit and recommit, over and over again, to attentiveness to God's invitation. So, go ahead, climb that high dive. I hope you jump in. Jesus will always be waiting for you, treading water in the deep end, and shouting words of encouragement and love. Amen.