

## From The Pastor

What kind of commitment is called for to follow the Christian gospel? Today, the social reality of commitment is itself challenged by the desire to be free from long term, or possibly painful circumstances. If this is true in the context of social relationships and personal conviction, then how might it affect our surrender to the faith we profess?

The nature of Christian discipleship is often called 'radical'. To fully live the call of self-giving love in the model of Jesus, in its fullest sense, is truly radical. The dictionary defines radical as a fundamental giving over of self in an extreme way. Through the centuries some have, in fact, responded to the gospel in this very way. The list is long and impressive of those who have marked, by their extreme response, the radical call to the gospel. In ancient times, we can identify people like Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and many others. In more modern times, we can name people like St. Francis of Assisi, Maximilian Kolbe, Martin Luther King, Mother Theresa, and Dorothy Day, among many others.

We can only thank God that we have such men and women who hear and obey a radical call to witness the gospel in such a fundamental way. They are a grace and inspiration. But what about the rest of us? Are we just slackers who profess the name of Jesus, taking the richness of what the gospel promises and go merrily along our way? Unfortunately, in some cases, this is in fact true. Yet for the majority, I do not believe it defines our desire to maturely follow the Lord Jesus.

The Webster definition of radical is 'fundamental, extreme, pushing for extreme change'. A more apt and effective spiritual or gospel meaning of the word radical would suggest a full-hearted surrender; a willing and life long commitment to seek the way of love, justice, peace, and self-giving that persists through inconvenience and resistance.

This is what Elisha does in the first reading, and what Jesus calls for in the gospel. Elisha doesn't know where his yes will take him, but he accepts God's call through Elijah with full-hearted surrender without looking back. He gives up a wealthy life, signified by his twelve oxen, which he slaughters and feeds to his family, which probably means the whole town. He takes leave of all he has known, and with full commitment follows Elijah to become his successor. This is radical because it is whole-hearted, with complete commitment, and surrender of all that might hold him back.

We are not all called to be Elisha. We are called to be intentionally and willingly whole-hearted in our desire to imitate, in the context of our own lives, the example of Jesus. We may shy away from these words and their implication, yet in many contexts it is exactly what we do in our lives.

What mature person does not enter into marriage without a radical love for their chosen spouse? I appreciate this ideal. Many do not do this. Many enter into marriage looking for someone to take care of them, or to escape their present situation of unhappiness. In true marriage, who doesn't make a willing and whole-hearted, intentional commitment to love their spouse to the best of their ability until the day they die? This commitment is radical and it is the intention and call of the Christian gospel.

This does not mean 'happily ever after'. It means I will love and honor you in love to the best of my ability with faith and trust in you and in God who has given you to me. I will at times fail, and disappoint you, but I will persist because I am committed to loving you. For some, this sounds great. For others it sounds scary and likely more than they could commit to.

Consider the 'radical' commitments we make to other things. Eight weeks of summer soccer for the kids at a hundred bucks a kid, plus equipment, cases of gatorade, time and travel, and constant waiting to pick up and transport. This is not for the faint of heart, and would not be offered to the kid who would quit after week two because it's too hot and 'the other kids don't like me'. This is a commitment of love. It is self-giving, and surrenders time and resources away for other options. Golf and bowling leagues are about the same kind of commitment. We give ourselves to these things and think nothing of the word commitment in this context. Such things should begin to reflect the kind of commitment we have to the gospel.

A full-hearted commitment to Christianity will have many faces. It will be lived out in a countless number of contexts, but will always employ the same radical virtues that the gospel teaches us. Self-giving love does not come on our terms. It comes by way of obedience to what is needed and called for in our particular circumstance. For spouses and parents it will be one way, for priests and religious another, for the single person, children, the elderly, the sick, the poor, the rich, or the disabled will all have a context out of which an intentional commitment can be made to live with love toward others. If done with love, this will call for surrender of things we would prefer not to hand over. Yet, in love, the handing over will seem natural and normal and without much second thought. In simple and day-to-day terms, that is what it means to live the radical call of the gospel of Jesus.

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