

Family Service with Baptism

Peace be with you from God our Father, Jesus Christ our brother and the Holy Spirit. The word which is given to us for this Sunday, we read from the gospel according to St Luke in chapter 18, the verses 28 -30:

Then Peter said, "Look, we have left our homes and followed you." And he said to them, "Truly, I tell you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life."

Dear God, bless on us your word and open our hearts for your Holy Spirit to dwell.

Dear Congregation

This short conversation between Jesus and His disciples, that we have just heard, is written in my German version of the Luther Bible under the heading, "*The reward of discipleship.*" That sounds encouraging. As Christians, we do not live without a purpose and a goal. And yet our feelings can become conflicted when we realize, how high the required input for following Christ is. We hear that the disciples of Jesus left everything behind – all their possessions, even their families. For Jesus' sake, they became poor and homeless, with nothing to bind them or tie them down.

1. The price of discipleship

Is this the only right way to follow Christ, we may ask? Is it this particular way that we are asked to embark on and follow if we want to inherit eternal life? Jesus' answer to this question is both hard and unmistakable: "Sell all that you have... and come follow me." This is what Jesus told the rich young ruler just a few verses earlier in our text. The young man was earnestly seeking the way to eternal life and asked Jesus about it. Upon Jesus' answer, he became very sad and depressed. This feeling can also overcome us when we hear these words.

Because we realize, that there are many things and people in our lives that we do not want to part with, not even for Jesus' sake. Our life would become empty, lonely and pointless. We realize also, what an immense, enormous, yes impossible expectation this call of Christ to follow Him is. Despite all our good will we have to painfully feel and admit to our inability to follow Jesus. We ask the same question as the rich young ruler and the bystanders who were listening to them, "Who, then, can be saved?" (vs. 26b)

2. The gift of discipleship

Jesus' answer to this question, "What is impossible for mortals is possible with God." (vs. 27) This is the Word of Hope for us today. We cannot come to God, but God can and wants to come to us. He already has: In Jesus God has come to us and made us His own. Even before we could even take half a step toward God, God has already reached us. In Jesus God wanted to bring back those who have turned their backs on Him and gone astray and win them over with His love. In Jesus God followed mortals, He went after them. In Jesus God made His way to us, dear friends. And God followed us to the very end – to death on the cross. God gave up everything for us, His people – He gave up His very own Son...

So, you see, following Christ is not about what we have to give up. It's about the One who gave up everything for us and followed us to the very end – up to death...

But then God also snatched Jesus from the claws of death and rose Him to new life. And so, Christ became the first fruits of those who have died; the first to rise from the dead to eternal life. God's making His way to us, God following us to the very end, did not end on that Good Friday. It leads way beyond

Easter, through the ages of time and all the generations until this very day and into our very lives. Why?

Because we are baptized! Through Holy Baptism we belong to the people that God went after. Through Holy Baptism we belong to the family and fellowship of people, whom God has loved and accepted through the death and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ. In Holy Baptism God came to each one of us personally and said “Yes” to us and to our lives, accepted and loved us unconditionally as He still does.

3. The commission (task) of discipleship

Therefore, “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine.” (Is. 43:1)

This Word has become a strong and steadfast reality in our lives through our baptism. With all that we are and all that we possess, we belong to God – because we are baptized in the Name of his Son. When we make ourselves aware of this solid foundation of our lives, again and again; when we understand our lives to be built on this solid foundation and live boldly and joyfully out of this reality, then we live as followers of Jesus Christ.

Both are important: how we look at our lives, what we understand our lives to be and how we live our lives accordingly. Jesus wants to take shape in our lives, fill our lives with meaning and purpose, not only in part, but fully. The specific call of the gospel in our lives will vary according to each individual. Jesus did not tell each and every person he encountered to sell all their possessions. It’s about who we are as individuals, the way we were created and in the specific place we were put on this earth, that we follow Christ there. That we ask the question: “What is the purpose that God has created me for, and where can I put my specific gift to good use in God’s kingdom?” And there’s no such thing of one way of following Christ being better than another. Whether you bring flowers for the altar on Sunday, or serve tea after the service; whether you participate in diaconic work reaching out to the needy in our society or help to create a pleasant environment in your workplace or carry the life and the needs of your congregation in prayer...

All these things and many others belong in the same “category” – following Christ!

4. The reward of discipleship

It should be clear by now: Before we can even think of following Christ He is following us and wants to take shape in our lives to give us true purpose and meaning and deep fulfillment. Sometimes we have to let go of things that stand in the way of us finding this true purpose and meaning for our lives and it can be costly and painful. But this will mean different things for different people. There is no set pattern or requirement what a disciple does with her talents or with his money. The gospel does not specify what we should do with our financial and physical resources, but it does call us to give cheerfully from the heart – not as a requirement for inheriting eternal life, but as a natural response to God’s saving grace toward us. Grace frees us to give and share freely and boldly as we trust in God to meet all our needs.

Oh, and one more thing. Wonder of wonders the camel does make it through the eye of the needle. Jesus gives us a new name as we are baptized into His name. That’s what you always get from him, a new name, son, daughter, child of God. Because in the last analysis that’s the only name that counts. Amen

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Saviour.

Amen.