

## 04 September 2022; Proper 18: Luke 14:25-33

We all crave security. This need for safety against fear and uncertainty is inborn, deep in our DNA, beyond excavation of memory or experience. Children rely on security blankets, cling to favorite toys, demand routine of place and people. Adults do the same: much of adult behavior is thinly disguised attempts at seeking or keeping security.

The crowds pushed on after Jesus. He surely realized the crowds' frenzied craving for security. He knows our need for feeling safe in a world of danger, savagery, and death. As Jesus and the crowd neared Jerusalem the stark choice between true security and false security is revealed. Jesus wants them to know where true safety lies; he tells them what true security costs.

Jesus speaks to three perennial sources of human confidence: family relationships, securing one's immediate environment, and military power. His language is extreme because he wants us to see the gulf between temporary and lasting security. We are most bothered by his words about family. Jesus did not intend these "over-the-top" statements to be taken with wooden literalness, any more than his words about cutting off one's offending hand or foot (cf. Mark 9:43-48). He is teaching by exaggeration to grab our complete attention. He wants us to know true security always involves sacrifice and risk, a profound re-ordering of priorities. Jesus is saying there is no real, lasting security apart from being his disciple. If we stake our souls on the comforts of family, or the security of our homes, or weapons of war—Jesus being a kind of term life insurance policy—we have it all backwards. Family members die, as one day we will; great buildings crumble, as one day everything will; weapons of war become obsolete, violence always boomerangs in some way. The security of family, bricks, and power is temporary; mine, says Jesus, is eternal. As we look at great buildings, we can assume they are permanent. Yet next Sunday we will remember with great sadness that two of our most magnificent buildings in perhaps our greatest city crashed to the ground in literally a billion pieces through the savagery of 19 terrorists. The most technologically advanced military and intelligence community in the world was powerless to stop it. I am not preaching fatalism nor reducing our national security efforts against terrorism foreign and domestic. Yet eternal well-being is not the result of temporal vigilance.

In Jesus is true, eternal security, but not as we expect or even want. He says: *Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple* (vs. 27); and *...none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions* (vs. 33). "Disciple" is a synonym for "student." A Disciple places her/his life under the authority of their teacher, learning the meaning of Scripture and Tradition, patterning their lives after the teacher's actions to apply such wisdom. Jesus gives a word-picture of Discipleship: we carry the cross. Yes, there will be courage, victory, peace but such are *fruits* of sacrifice, and cannot be had without it; we offer ourselves in Jesus for God's glory. Jesus doesn't mind camp-followers, the vaguely curious, or even those who want everything for nothing. It is just that they will always be on the outside looking in. The timid and skeptical can never know deep happiness and true fulfillment unless and until they too take up Jesus' cross.

He says "give up" possessions. As before we take this beyond literalness. If your hands, minds, hearts are full of temporary things, you cannot carry the cross. We empty ourselves of attachments to momentary, fleeting security and cling to the cross of Christ. We do this by spiritually and physically letting go of our props. We are vulnerable so God makes us strong. First the ego goes: we admit we know only a little. The prayer *Thy will, not mine, be done* is our way of life. We offer our weakness, limitations, and fears to God and ask the Holy Spirit to work in and through us. The results will not always go our way, but then we know only a little. If you humble yourself, acknowledging your brokenness, the unmanageability of your life, then God will speak to you and through you. There is no better security.

Remember this: being a disciple is not something to own and control, as we do with lesser securities. Discipleship is a gift received through the daily offering of oneself to God, the daily cross-bearing of Jesus' life. Therefore, I end this homily as I usually begin, with the prayer of self-dedication, page 832 in the Prayer Book: *Almighty God, so draw our hearts to you, so guide our minds, so fill our imaginations, so control our wills, that we may be wholly yours, utterly dedicated to you; then use us we pray as you will, and always to your glory and the welfare of your people; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*