

Fifth Sunday in Pentecost
June 29, 2010

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Beginning next week we'll hear somewhat different words during our Eucharist Prayer and since I don't happen to be your preacher, I'd like to make a few remarks about Eucharist Prayer C today. The third of four options in our Book of Common Prayer for our contemporary language Eucharist prayers. Prayer C – we do it all summer—Eucharist Prayer, that's the prayer during which the celebrant reminds us why we're doing what we do when we "take this in remembrance of me". It's the "Prayer of Consecration" in which the bread and wine become in some indescribable way, Christ's body and blood. And it's the prayer which leads us together toward the remarkable gifts of receiving Christ at God's altar. In Prayer C which as I say, we'll use all summer, In the closing section after the Bread and wine have been consecrated the celebrant asks God several things: "that our eyes might be opened to see your hand at work in the world about us", that "we come to this table not merely for solace, but for strength" and that "we may be made one body, one spirit in Christ" that we "may worthily serve the world in his name". In this rich prayer we're asking to be Jesus' disciples, to worthily serve the world in his name. "Disciples" – that's all of us who follow Jesus not merely his twelve or so contemporaries who formed the group he taught and led. In today's gospel Jesus talks about discipleship employing some of his hard sayings, statements which have proven difficult for many of us to interpret: foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the son of man has nowhere to lay his head and let the dead bury their dead, but as for you go and proclaim the Kingdom of God. And then to the third person who says he will come along with Jesus as soon as he goes to say goodbye to his family – no one who puts hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God. Jesus is always the master of hyperbole, exaggerated sayings meant to make his point abundantly clear. But for us two thousand years away from the setting of these sayings they certainly don't seem abundantly clear to me. It is, however clear that he's talking about how to be faithful, how to be discipleships. Time and time again throughout our history we've fallen away from God; we've lost the core of discipleship and Prayer C which we start next week recalls our story as God's people —what we call "salvation history" in these words "Again and again you called us to return; through prophets and sages you revealed your righteous law

and in the fullness of time you sent your only son born of a woman to fulfill your law to open for us the way of freedom and peace – “the way of freedom and peace” straight out of Paul’s letter to the Galatians which is often called the “Charter of Christian Freedom”. Jesus the Christ has given us freedom, but it’s no kind of freedom from responsibility. The discipleship Jesus talks about in the readings we’ll hear throughout the next months -- that discipleship costs something. It is a freely bestowed gift – freely bestowed through the grace of God, but along with it comes a call to us to be committed. And it’s commitment that Jesus is talking about in these hard sayings – these strange sayings about foxes’ holes and birds’ nests and the dead burying their own dead, the one at the plow not looking back. These strange sayings are all about total commitment. In today’s passage from the gospel the disciples are walking along the road in Samaria; Samaria, the part of Palestine hostile to the Jews – the Samaritans and the Jews disagreeing about their theology. And they’re in Samaria heading toward Jerusalem where Jesus knows he’s to be betrayed, tried, denied, crucified. Jesus will demonstrate for them and for us total commitment. And he’s using this time as they approach Jerusalem to teach his followers, his disciples, those who are learning from him, that’s what disciple comes from the Latin. Those who are learning from him are learning about commitment. A man approaches the band and offers himself and Jesus makes that strange answer about foxes and birds and holes and nests, but Jesus is merely a vagabond with nowhere to lay his head. The implication here is that following of Jesus demands letting go of worldly security. Not just of worldly things, but of security. Does security really exist? Do we fool ourselves in thinking we’re secure? For sure the members of Jesus’ band have left their homes behind – they’ve walked away from their nets and indeed they’ve been homeless for several years. Then Jesus summons another person and invites him to “follow me” and when the man asks first to go back – perhaps not literally to bury his father – but rather to finish the task of being his father’s son until when his father eventually dies and he can assume his role as an adult member of the family. He asks to do that and Jesus responds about the dead in spirit caring for their own – let the dead bury their own dead – but as for you – go and proclaim the Kingdom – go and be a disciple. Now this isn’t story, this is Jesus teaching. We never learn what becomes of these three men; these “would be disciples”. The third person says he’ll come, but first he wants to say goodbye to his family and Jesus responds with what I think is the strangest saying “No one puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God”. Don’t live in the past. Freedom from earthly claims, material claims, even familial claims

seems to be at the base of these teachings. In his highly respected commentary on Luke, theologian William Barclay writes of this particular passage: “No one can ever say that the man in the above scripture passage was induced to follow Jesus under false pretenses. Jesus paid people the compliment of pitching his demands so high that they cannot be hired. And then William Barclay throws in this zinger “It may well be that we have done great hurt to the church by letting people think that church membership need not make so much difference in their lives. Is church membership kind of like the club Woody Allen doesn’t want to belong to because it’s too easy? He’s said to have commented “I never want to belong to a club that I could get into” -- and in his amusing comment wise profundity. For self-worth we seek something to be more elevated – requirements both for entrance and for continued membership. Theologian Barclay continues; “We ought to tell people that church membership should make all the difference in the world. We might have fewer people but those we had would really be pledged to Christ – pledged to Christ; I love that term – pledged to Christ – committed. In this culture of ease where every advertisement claims: you can be thin with no effort; or you can cook gourmet food with no preparation; or you can become a different person in three easy steps, or even you can learn a new language in your sleep. In this culture where anything worth doing is supposedly without effort, who in heaven’s name is Madison Avenue kidding – I think a lot of us -- anyway, over and over against this something for nothing culture, Jesus calls us to be his followers, but Jesus never claims there will be no cost. We members of Christ’s church can fall into the lure of modern culture claiming that grace is indeed a free gift of God and we therefore we can merely lie back and enjoy amazing grace with no effort. Well, indeed the grace is free. Paul tells us “for freedom Christ has set us free, but grace propels those of us who accept it into lives of action and action on behalf of God’s world -- and it’s hard work. The commandment to love one another, love one’s neighbor as one’s self – Christ’s summary of God’s law, takes effort – effort fueled by grace. If we love one another as we’ve been loved – that means actions, not warm fuzzy feelings. We must work to show those fruits of God’s spirit, the fruits Paul writes of today in the section of his Epistle to the Galatian Church – the fruits: joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control – self-control -- none of these happen without effort. Patience, kindness – how hard we must work at times to retain self-control; how we must return again and again to being faithful from the words of Prayer C – “Again and again you called us to return. Examples of “fruit of the spirit” actions; active listening – this is demanding – it means we leave behind our

own thoughts, our desires, our distractions as we focus on the other whom we've offered to listen to and it's done when the other person needs it, not when we feel like it. Fomenting for positive change within a system which has long tolerated racism or poverty or hunger or homelessness; all of you who worked for change well know that patience, consistency and really hard work are demanded of you. The lovely shawl which I'll bet you haven't noticed which wraps our flowers – we have two of them there of two different colors. I'll bet that those of you who are close enough to see the fabric have no idea they are prayer shawls. These shawls are knit by Trinity members who are committed to knitting industriously and praying unceasingly while they knit. Trinity prayer shawls – their commitment – the commitment of the knitters -- results in people feeling deeply comforted when wrapped in the prayers of Trinity during an illness or before surgery or when you've lost a loved one. At times of uncertainty, at times of pain – commitment to knitting. When we – and today it's the last time for a while – when we listen to our choir sing faultlessly with total clarity of tongue and perfect ensemble – we might kid ourselves that they do it easily because they're all fine musicians; on the contrary – practice, practice, practice – patience, endurance, commitment. When Jesus says “my yoke is easy and my burden light”, I believe he means “I share your burden”; we're yoked together. The yoke is between you, my follower and me and therefore you can bare it – whatever, for I am there with you. Never does he mean that all will be easy. It is why so many people who approached Jesus just like the three men in today's reading turned away when they really heard Jesus' message. I always think of the wise young ruler who sadly walks away. For Jesus' message is no gospel of ease; Jesus' gospel challenges us to embrace commitment – unconditional commitment. And the man who models that for us, the God-man who suffered and died for us never lived on easy street. Week after week we may come to this Holy table not merely for solace but for strength. Week after week we'll be fed God's food – the bread of life -- in order that we may worthily serve the world in God's name. Holy food endows us with Holy strength.