

## THE MESSAGE

March 21, 2010

Luke 14:25-33

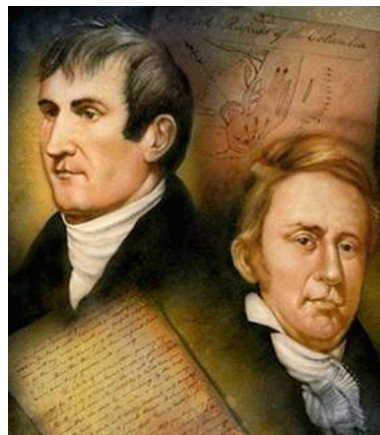
The Rev. Dr. R. K. Miller

*Stewards: Teaching and Trusting*

Their names were Meriwether Lewis and William Clark – pioneers, explorers, risk takers (*pictures on the screen*). For 28 months, in the early 1800's even before Friedens existed (May 14, 1804, until September 23, 1806), Lewis and Clark were on an expedition from St. Louis, Missouri, to the Oregon Coast, and then back to St. Louis. They were looking for a land route to the Pacific, strengthening American claims to the Oregon territory, and gathering information about the indigenous inhabitants and the country of the far west. So writes Stephen Ambrose in his book *Undaunted Courage*.<sup>1</sup>



There is an amazing moment in this story when Lewis invites Clark to go along on this journey. Leaving St. Louis, they would launch into uncharted territory, literally stepping off the map. They would count the cost of leaving family, friends, and the familiar behind. They would press on into an adventure that would change their lives, and change the lives of many, many others too. Including ours...



Lewis invited Clark to join him. And here is Clark's amazing response (*on the screen*):

*"I will cheerfully join you and partake of the dangers, difficulties and fatigues... and I anticipate the honors and rewards of such an enterprise... with many difficulties. But, my friend, I do assure you that no man lives with whom I would prefer to undertake such a trip... as yourself."*

Clarke's reply gives us a glimpse of a man whose trust and faith, in another compels him to set aside everything he knows and loves for the sake of a mission and adventure that is beyond both of them. The journey would be no piece of cake.

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Ambrose's account of the expedition in his amazing book, *Undaunted Courage*, is among the best ever written about the adventure.

“Dangers, difficulties, fatigues,” for sure. All of that would certainly become reality. Yet pale in comparison to this awesome opportunity to follow his friend on an adventure.

For us, the journey to follow Jesus is no piece of cake. It was never intended to be, although some people like to argue that point. I know the church didn't mean to, but for years, we really tried to make it easy to follow Jesus. According to our church constitution the only expectation for church membership is that a person must commune once (participate in communion) and contribute some amount of money in the past two years – and you are considered a voting member. Maybe that's why it is so important that we realize being a church member is not necessarily the same thing as being a disciple of Jesus.

We seemed to have made discipleship a walk in the park -- making it more about us than about Jesus. There is no need to blame or point fingers or get upset here but to see this as a golden opportunity.

Simply put, we've turned following Jesus into a misguided misadventure that many people don't even want to consider. We've done that! Maybe that's why people avoid the church. Look around where are all the younger people and what are we failing to do that prevent them from wanting to be here? The idea of following a man who washed feet and hung on a cross for our sake *should* have a huge impact in our lives. Why doesn't it?

I believe God is up to something in our midst, something great and wonderful. Do you? I say that because we worship a great and wonderful God. Do you believe that? I also believe that Luke is trying to tell us something in our reading today about our part in God's plan for the world. I hope you do too.

Listen now to our reading from Luke 14 (*Read Luke 14:25-35*).

I included verse 34 & 35 because that's how Luke ends this chapter. But these two verses seem out of place until we consider what Jesus is saying here. Jesus is saying that when salt loses its saltiness (get this) it isn't even good for the manure pile but must be thrown out. Same thing applies with his disciples. When a disciple loses his or her discipleship, Jesus is saying, he or she isn't even good for the manure pile. Now that's saying something very profound...

Jesus was saying to the crowd that day (and to us here today) discipleship is not easy and not for the fainthearted. It's a life-long process, a life-long calling. Jesus is crystal clear about that. He is saying these things on his way to Jerusalem on his way to the cross. He knows what awaits him there; mockery, loneliness, rejection, torture and death. Jesus is telling his disciples what to expect when it comes to following him. The point is, discipleship requires making Jesus a priority in one's life no matter what. And it's going to cost us.

Jesus must be first in our lives. That's the point. Discipleship is a tough road to take. It means placing our trust, our complete trust in Jesus and doing what he says to do. "Trust Jesus... Follow Jesus..." "Okay," we tend to say. But Jesus knows our true motives and says, "*you cannot be my disciple unless you hate father, mother, wife, children, brother, sister, and even your own life...*" That's pretty radical.

I don't know about you but growing up in our household, we were not allowed to say the word, "hate" about anything. "Find another word." My parents would insist. That's the way it is in our household too. We tend to encourage our children not to say, "hate" but "strongly dislike." Try that with this passage... "*Whoever comes to me and does not 'strongly dislike' father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.*" It just doesn't have the same kick?

Perhaps a better translation would be "love less." "*Whoever doesn't love less their father or mother, sister or brother,*" etc... The idea is not that we should hate anything especially our family or our lives, but in comparison to Jesus, we are called to "love them less." We are to love others less than we love Jesus. Now that makes sense.

After all Jesus is all about loving not hating. In the New Testament Jesus gave us five love directives (*on the screen*):

1. love God;
2. love our neighbors;
3. love ourselves;
4. love our enemies; and
5. love one another.

Anytime Jesus' disciples get together there ought to be a lot (I mean a lot) of loving going on wherever we are. For the record, Jesus was no hater, he was a lover. He beacons us his disciples to do the same. He calls us to love him more than anyone else or anything else.

Jesus wants all of us, not just part of us. He is jealous *for us* for a relationship with us. He is not jealous *of us* but *for us*. He wants all of us all the time not just Sunday mornings or Wednesday nights. Discipleship is 24/7/365 calling, and that's the point of this passage. It comes down to *devotion* and *obedience* to Jesus.

The best way I can describe it for me is like this. Jesus is my GPS, my global positioning system. Heaven is my ultimate destination and I don't want to lose that reward. But I can, I don't want to end up at that other place. So as I travel though life with Jesus as he tells me when to turn, what road to take, etc. "Rob, go see so and so..." "Rob, call so and so..." Rob, pray for so and so..."

I take the roads Jesus tells me to take so that I can share a glimpse of heaven with others in the here and now. Do I always take the road Jesus tells me to take, no. Sometimes I miss it. Sometimes I mess-up royally. Jesus simply modifies the directions. Sometimes he tells me to turn around, to make a u-turn, to repent.

Folks, before obedience and devotion to Jesus can happen, repentance must take place. In the book of Acts Peter tells the people how great and wonderful God is, loving us through Jesus and his cross. The people asked how they should respond to God's love. Peter says, "Repent, and be baptized... in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"(Acts 2:38). No one has ever responded to one of my sermons that way but if you did. If you asked me, "What should you do?" I would say, "repent and remember your baptism and be open to the Holy Spirit at work in your life."

Repentance precedes devotion and obedience to Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit into a person's life. Repentance is a common word in our church. And yet, we need to make it more than just a word. We need to practice it. Repentance is essential for life in the church and for the mission we share in the world.

Jesus said, he came to call not the righteous, but sinners to repent (Matt. 9:13). Repentance and faith are inseparable. They are two sides of the same coin. You cannot have one without the other.

So what is repentance? It's a change in heart, mind, and action towards Jesus and his commands. It literally means to "turn around" and do a 180. It calls for a change of our hearts, our minds, and our actions. Have you ever said anything bad about your pastor, or this church, or another church, or about someone in it, or allowed gossip to spread, or negativity to continue, or whatever (you name it....)? If so, it's time to repent.

Are you doing everything possible through your giving of yourself to make this church the great church we have the potential to be in producing disciples for Jesus? If not, then it's time to repent! We are God's vehicle of grace and love in the world. When we fail to do that we must repent and we get back on track with Jesus.

We need to put Jesus first, daily. We need to love God's agenda more than our own agenda. We need to be stewards of God's grace. But this doesn't just happen automatically. It takes work, together. It takes devotion and obedience to follow the one who died so that we can live.

It's like Clark's response to follow and be with Lewis (*on the screen*):

*"I will cheerfully join you and partake of the dangers, difficulties and fatigues ... and I anticipate the honors and rewards of such an enterprise ... with many difficulties. But, my friend, I do assure you that no man lives with whom I would prefer to undertake such a trip ... as yourself."*

I believe God is calling us out of our comfort zone and into life-changing adventure with Jesus. So, we must be willing to go where he goes, to do what he does, to think what he thinks. We need to spend time with Jesus regularly.

Yesterday, my son said, “Dad I love being with you, and doing things with you.” I said, “I feel the same way about being with you.” This week I hope you can say that about being with Jesus. And I hope he can say that about being with you.

What changes do you need to make in your life this week so that you can faithfully follow Jesus? What is God saying to you here today about how you might, “love less” your stuff and love more of God’s stuff?

My prayer is that you will invest your life in Jesus this week and be guided by the Holy Spirit. That you will be able to truly live into this bold statement of faith...

Say this with me (*on the screen*),

*“Jesus, we will cheerfully join you and partake of the dangers, difficulties and fatigues ... and we anticipate the honors and rewards of such an enterprise ... with many difficulties. But my friend Jesus, we are assured that no one lives with whom we would prefer to undertake such a trip ... as yourself!”* Amen.