

Homily: Luke 14: 25-33

I stand before you today in the name of our Lord and Messiah Jesus Christ. It is indeed a great privilege to serve God and His children, and I am truly grateful to the visionary leadership of our Archbishop Colin Robert Johnson, Bishop Patrick Yu and Reverend David Howells. This is definitely God's plan and I consider it an honor to be part of the Grace Church community.

I come from a family of evangelists, both from my mother and father's side. My grandparents Reverend Titus Godala, a former Hindu priest, and Reverend Purushotham Dumpala, a Hindu Landlord were Anglican missionaries in the erstwhile State of Hyderabad, a princely colony of British India. My journey began with Christ in October 1978 soon after attending a "Youth For Christ" camp and always wondered where He would eventually lead me. After my initial career in Marketing Communications in India and another eighteen years in Saudi Arabia, God brought us to Canada in October 2010 to reveal his grand plan to become part of the Anglican community once again.

Today's lectionary readings have definite meaning to my spiritual upbringing and commitment to follow Christ. As Paul says "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain (Philippians 1:21) leads us back to the Gospel reading. As I ponder on the prerequisites to follow Jesus, He calls, commands and compels us to make a choice. Who will become our priority in life? Is it going to be our family or Jesus himself! Jesus is suggesting a radical detachment with the world, our normal life and its sentiments, particularly relating to Middle Eastern family traditions and authority.

Jesus wants us to know that discipleship is not an easy task, nor without a price and His instructions seem very confrontational. The three essential conditions that Jesus points to are the willingness to leave family ties, willingness to face martyrdom and finally the willingness in giving up material possessions. This is in direct contrast to the conditions for joining the armed forces. A friend of mine decided to follow Christ during his teen years and announced that he had a call to serve God's children. However, soon upon completing his under graduate program, he abandoned his calling to pursue his graduate studies only to end up in the market place. He became a laughing stock, as many would now see him as the man with the 'wrong call'.

As we look closely into the parables of building a tower and going to war, Jesus dictates a serious reflection before someone makes a decision to follow Him. In these parables Jesus points to Herod's building of the temple and what it is for? Jesus has already warned that God had abandoned his house (13:35). A wise king does not go to war unprepared or until he studies intricately of his enemy's strengths. And if he determines that his army will not be able to meet the challenge, he will offer peace before the enemy arrives at his doorstep.

Jesus' instructions are crystal clear as he says that if it is too demanding for anyone, he must not respond to his call. And if that individual does accept his calling, he must then take up his cross and pursue his journey with Christ obediently. This is about an open war of non-violence that eventually leads to the ultimate victory for seeking eternal life. Christ wants us to be sure, absolutely sure that he or she who answers the call must understand what it takes to build the tower (life). Too often it is perceived that the call to discipleship is receiving the great benefits offered by God. There are eternal benefits and advantages, but salvation and discipleship involve much more. They involve an unbelievable cost, the supreme sacrifice to follow Christ.

I encourage myself by remembering time and again about Elisha's response to God's calling. God tells Elijah to anoint Elisha as the prophet to replace him. Elijah finds Elisha plowing in a field with a pair of oxen and immediately throws his mantle on Elisha as an invitation to follow him. Elisha immediately obeys and burns his plow and cooks the oxen and gives it to his friends to eat. Without any hesitation, Elisha exhibits a deep commitment to Elijah. He wastes no time in obeying. He does not go away to take time to think about it or lists down pros and cons. He immediately said yes to God's calling through Elijah. Elisha's commitment demonstrates that the cost of following God is great but the cost of not following Him is even greater.

President Roosevelt met King Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia to review the situation in Palestine. When King Abdul Aziz was asked how he positions himself within the community of Arab leaders, his answer was "I am a Muslim first and an Arab second". Therefore what would be our position in our walk with Jesus? Are we Christians first and Canadians second or vice versa? Are we ready to pay the price to follow Christ and claim a place in His Kingdom? A genuine and a serious believer's response would be to say 'Yes' and become a witness not only to new believers but also to his or her dear ones.

Jesus is not talking about feelings of animosity, but of priority and He does not mean that we abandon our families but demonstrate the willingness to understand the seriousness of the call to follow Him. Both my grandparents had to give up everything due to a hostile response of their families, yet ended up introducing most of them to Christ. One might be prompted to imagine how Jesus would deal with the current mindset of the global community. His instruction to follow him would be just the same.

As in Jesus' time, the family values in most communities in today's context seem to have a grip not only on personal lives but also spiritual. Discipleship is not voluntary but a firm commitment to the government of God in this world. Our allegiance to Christ increasingly places us at odds with the society and culture.

In this journey as we join Christ up to Jerusalem, into suffering and death, we must identify ourselves as His obedient and true followers in the fellowship of dishonor and suffering. Jesus perfectly obeyed the will of His Father without hesitation or compromise and therefore let remind encourage ourselves once again as Paul says, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain"

Because of Christ. Amen.