

## Pastor Roy's Sermon from Sept. 8, 2013

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jesus tells his disciples, "None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions." This is a difficult passage. How do we give up all our possessions? I'd like to think out loud about that, and then I want to say how our prayerful worship helps us release our possessions, our gifts, and ourselves to God's mercy.

I hear Jesus saying, "If you want peace, you must give yourself totally over to its wisdom and healing. Grace which picks and chooses is simply a new version of bondage to our egos. If we wish to live in mercy, we must grow into mercy. If we want love, we must give ourselves fully over to choosing the paths of faithful love.

"None of you can become my disciples if you do not give up all your possessions." We cannot be possessed by love if we are possessed by possessions.

But what does Jesus mean when he says "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple"? Since Jesus does not proclaim the virtues of hate, we assume he is getting our attention by overstating his point. Love is more important than any other loyalties. Love defines our commitments as followers of Christ. So any loyalties which the Spirit of Christ calls us to release are unhealthy, dysfunctional ones.

Therefore, love your family, but if your family demands that you follow them into unhealthy, dysfunctional practices, then it is no contest who you should follow! We follow the love of Christ. In that sense, we set aside loyalties—even in family relationships--which conflict with the true love of Christ. But it's important to remember that even in this, we act in love. We release in love. We are centered in love.

[Take Philemon and Onesimus. Onesimus, a slave, abandoned Philemon, his owner. Philemon is tempted to treat his brother Onesimus not as an equal brother in Christ who has loyally served Paul, Philemon's spiritual father, but as an escaped slave liable to punishment. The punishment for an escaped slave was quite severe. The slave had no social or legal rights. Paul reminds Philemon that his commitment to the ways and message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ takes priority over social and legal traditions. Paul is calling Philemon to reach beyond power loyalties to the freeing truth that all are equally beloved of God to be welcomed in that love. The truth is never far beneath the surface if we truly wish to know and practice it.]

So centering ourselves in the love of Christ will lead us to use our possessions, power, and loyalties truly for the cause of Christ--for compassion, for justice.

Our weekly worship takes this call to love seriously and the fact that we ever need to be renewed in this love and inspired to love creatively.

So after we remember God and our baptism and God's assurance of mercy, we sing a gathering song, and then we pray for mercy. "In peace, let us pray to the Lord." "**Lord have mercy.**" For the peace from above and for our salvation, let us pray to the Lord. **Lord have mercy.** For the peace of the whole world, for the wellbeing of the Church of God and for the unity of the all, let us pray to the Lord. **Lord have mercy.** For this holy house, and for all who offer here their worship and praise, let us pray to the Lord. **Lord have mercy.** Help, Save, Comfort, and Defend us gracious Lord. Amen.

In the challenges of discipleship in the love of Christ, we pray these things each week. They remind us what we're about. All the prayers in our liturgy draw us back to our center.

Turn in your bulletin to the Kyrie in the beginning. Kyrios is the Greek word for Lord. Peace is the beginning of prayer. We pray because inward peace begins with radical trust and giving up our faith in our own powers—a lifelong process. Peace is not what happens when we finally sort everything out and provide for ourselves and those we love. Peace is rest in Someone greater—the Ground of all Being. This prayer brings us to that rest which frees us from the never ending pursuit of possessions and power and security.

In this prayer, we pray for peace from above. Obviously we are not looking up literally. We are looking beyond what we see all around us. The peace from above is not simply the sum of our experiences. Peace carries us beyond them into the presence of the One who holds all things. One beyond our ability to describe and define and control. But One who defines us with love. One who grants the final judgment of peace. One into whose presence and mercy we entrust ourselves and all.

...For our salvation. Every time we gather, we are not begging to be saved. We are entrusting our hope, life, and meaning into God's care. Accepting the meaning and fullness of our life in God's care is our salvation. Being lifted by the Spirit of God out of our smallness, frustration, sin, and despair into the expanse of God's mercy and peace which knows no bounds.

...For the peace of the whole world, for the wellbeing of the church, for the unity of all. In this we pray for the church and the world. We are not exclusive. We are not better or different from the rest of the world. We are praying the same things for ourselves that we are praying for all people because these are universal needs.

The Kyrie humbles us even as Jesus' statement about giving up all our possessions humbles us. Jesus is calling us to humility and that our faith will make a difference in our lives. This humility is the foundation of our lives and the source of all of our strength.

...For this holy house, and for all who offer here their worship and praise... This holy house speaks first of the gathered community of Christ. We're not talking about drywall and bricks, heating systems and florescent tubes. We're talking about people. We are a holy house, we have given ourselves, our time, and our possessions over to God. Of course we have dedicated this building to the mercies of God. This building is a sign of what God is doing when we gather to offer here our worship and praise.

Finally, we confess we have no final power in this life, so we call out to God to help, save, comfort, and defend us. We can't do it ourselves.

These prayers which we pray every week, help us as we are mindful of what we are praying to offer everything to God. We are powerless to hold it back even if we try. We might as well offer all our possessions to God so that we may be as free of them and our attachments as possible. The same is true as we offer our time, and our gifts and talents.

God help us to take Jesus' invitation to freedom seriously. We pray about these things in worship. Let us also form our own prayers around these points of freedom to release our cares continually into the mercy of God. Thanks be to God. Amen.