

There are always crowds in the Gospel of Luke. Crowds gathering around John the Baptist, crowds searching for Jesus, crowds listening to him from the shoreline or pressing in on him in the streets. But in today's Gospel reading, Luke wants us to know that these crowds are different. These crowds are exceptional. They are "large crowds," masses of men, women, and children – no longer just the dozen disciples but dozens upon dozens of others, trailing after Jesus from town to town, walking and listening and stopping and eating and sleeping and getting up early in the morning to do it all again. It must have been quite a sight, this throng moving in to the small villages of the Galilee, announcing their arrival with a wall of dust and the sound of hundreds of slapping sandals. They probably ate whole villages' worth of bread and drank wells' full of water. These crowds of disciples truly contained multitudes.

The size of the crowds in this Gospel is an interesting backdrop for Jesus' teaching about the cost of discipleship –

interesting for two very different reasons. First, it seems that it's the size of the crowds that prompts Jesus to address this topic in the first place. For the past several chapters, he has been sharing the good news of the great banquet of the Kingdom of Heaven. He has been telling everyone who would listen that there is room for multitudes at this banquet, even those usually excluded – that there is room, in other words, for large crowds. Message obviously received. And now that these large crowds are here, Jesus feels the time is right to share the next chapter of the Good News. Yes, the banquet hall of God's Kingdom is capacious; yes, there is room in God's Reign for you. But, Jesus reminds them, while it is true that God intends to do great things for you, it is also true that God intends to do great things to you, things that will change your life forever. Walking in this way is not without cost – to be a disciple, you will be asked to pay whatever price the Gospel might demand. You will be asked to let go – of your friends, your family, your possessions, even your life. The invitation

to this wedding banquet is yours for the taking, but you must know that by accepting it, your life will never be the same again. Jesus talks to these large crowds that they might see all this and understand, that might know that they are following not a maître d' but a Messiah.

It sounds like a warning, but it's not. Jesus tells them all this out of love, and with great joy. These new followers delight him, and he wants nothing more than to share with them the very good news that God's Grace was not and never would be, cheap. God's Grace would always be costly, because it would always be real - authentic, true, and well worth the price. It's important to remember that Jesus tells these large crowds of this cost not because he wants some of them to leave, but because he so desperately wants all of them to stay.

So there's something about the size of these crowds that prompted Jesus to begin talking about discipleship in this new way. But if we dig down a little deeper into the nature of these crowds we can see a second reason that their presence is so interesting. Here was

an overwhelming mass of people, responding enthusiastically to Jesus' tales of banquets and heavenly tables with room to spare. And all of these people, all of these multitudes, *had already* done all the things Jesus was telling them about. These people were already following; they had already given up their possessions, risked relationships between friends and family, upended their whole lives. They had counted the cost and appeared more than willing to pay it. In other words, here was a whole horde of people demonstrating exactly what discipleship looked like. Discipleship looked like walking and listening and stopping and eating and sleeping and getting up early in the morning to do it all again. It looked like trust. It looked like faith. It looked costly and precious and too important to lose. That kind of deep discipleship was already richly present in those large crowds of followers. But Jesus told them all of this anyway. Why - just as a reminder? Possibly. But the truth is that as Jesus looked out across those multitudes of followers, he actually had a much larger

crowd in mind. Jesus was also thinking about us.

When Jesus said, “None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions,” he was talking to us – to you and to me. And as much as we might like to imagine that he was talking, really, to some other kind of Christian, when we picture him speaking before these multitudes who had left everything to follow him, we have to face the probability that Jesus was not speaking to us metaphorically. He was not telling us to give up our possessions in our hearts. He meant that to be a disciple, we actually have to surrender the stuff. And for the many of us sitting in these pews who live with an excess of possessions, that means that we have to face the truth that Jesus is inviting us to change and to be changed. Jesus is inviting us to let him transform us into a fuller, more faithful disciple. There is no way around it – Jesus is talking to us, and Jesus means what he says: give up all your possessions.

Believe me, I know how challenging this is. Most of us are

trying to live as Christ’s disciples without giving away even most of our possessions, let alone all of them. We are afraid to lose things, terrified of letting go, and so instead of giving away our possessions, we spend our time trying to discern which possessions Christ would want us to have, which ones are eco-friendly and fair trade, which ones support local businesses and fund righteous causes. We try to live as disciples while still possessing all kinds of stuff, stuff we need, stuff we don’t need, stuff we like, stuff we’ve forgotten about; we even try to possess people, time, control. But today Jesus reminds this particular crowd of people that there is a better way for us. Because Jesus not only sees the cost of discipleship; Jesus also sees the costs of the way that you and I so often try to live. Jesus sees that it’s terribly, devastatingly costly to live a life of constant accumulation. He sees how harmful it is to us when we try to possess more and more, how possessing things leads us away from gratitude and into idolatry, how possessing people leads us away from real love and into subjugation,

how possessing time or power or control leads us away from Grace into madness. Jesus sees how hungry this kind of life leaves us, how much it costs us in peace, love, and holiness.

And so Jesus offers us this still more excellent way: become my disciple; give away all your possessions. Don't hold on to your things or your relationships or your life so tightly that you cannot leap up and dance behind me. Don't let your possessions deceive you into thinking that they make you who you are, that they make you lovable, beautiful, worthy. Don't let your accumulation of possessions begin to harden your heart to all those sitting at the other end of the banquet table. Let go of all those things that stand between you and God – let go and you will see that you still have enough. It is the letting go that helps you see that you have enough – enough stuff, enough time, enough love, enough Grace, enough faith. Just enough.

Maybe we can't give away all our possessions today. But maybe we can take a few more steps along the road behind Jesus. Maybe we

can stop buying more of that one thing we tell ourselves we cannot resist – books, toys, fine wine or cheap gadgets. Maybe we can still buy local and sustainable but simply buy less. Maybe we start lending and borrowing instead of buying and throwing away. Maybe we start looking for those who have less than they need instead of the next online deal. Maybe trusting that God will provide enough for us helps us to see how God might use us to provide for others. Maybe living a life of enough means that we finally begin to know what people mean when they say that everything in this world is a gift. Maybe we begin to live each day with a deeper sense of gratitude that we have ever known. And maybe, in the face of this kind of thanksgiving, the costs of this discipleship start to look easier and easier for us to pay. Give away all our possessions, take up the cross and follow – what is this in comparison to the infinitude of God's Grace, the banquet that is ours to enjoy?

Give away all your possessions. My beloved, Jesus does not say

this as a warning. Jesus tell us this not because he wants you to leave, but because he so desperately wants you to stay. Because he so desperately wants you to be his. Give up all your possessions, and be made his own.

*Preached by Mother Erika Takacs*

*8 September 2019*

*Church of the Atonement, Chicago*