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SA Lenten Devotions 2018 “The Foolishness of Discipleship” Week 4

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LENJEN
DEVOTIONS

THE
Fool
THE
Beloved

A CONCORDIA SEMINARY
STUDENT COLLABORATION
LENT 2018

“The Foolishness of Discipleship”

Week 4

Take up your cross. Lose your life. Deny yourself. Sell all you have and give to the poor. Don't bury your dead or know where you'll lay your head. Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you. Turn the other cheek, give up your clothes, and give to everyone who begs from you. Carry no moneybag, sandals, or knapsack, and don't greet passers-by.

None of these things sounds like a sure-fire way to the good life. From the world's perspective, they are all quite foolish. As, it would seem, is discipleship. Yet we know they are commands from the lips of our Lord Jesus Christ to his (would-be) disciples. This week, with the help of several students, we explore and meditate on some of these calls just a bit, as we consider this “foolishness” of discipleship.

The way of Jesus is not easy, and He did not promise that it would be. But neither did he shy away from it Himself. He walked it to the very end, and He died because of it. But He also rose and proved the wisdom of His way, which gives us proof that everything He said is trustworthy and true. And thus as children called by baptism into lives of discipleship, we look forward to the day when He brings us through death into resurrection—the true good life.

But for now as we follow Christ we find ourselves somewhere in the middle, between the love of the world and the foolishness of the cross, between the ashes of our sin and the glory of the resurrection. May these meditations on His call to discipleship give you strength as you continue the journey. And may they increase your faith in the one who called you, who is faithful unto death, and who will guard you in the salvation He has won for you.

“The Foolishness of Discipleship”

Monday

March 5, 2018

Seminarian Chris Heaton, 4th Year

Based on Luke 10:3-4

“Go! Look...I am sending you (with a commission) as lambs in the midst of wolves. Stop carrying a money pouch, or a knapsack, or sandals...and greet no one along the way.”

At the end of chapter nine, Jesus has three interactions with would-be followers. Each one has a life situation that seems to preclude him from going on the way with Jesus. It appears that this road is exacting. Now, at the beginning of chapter ten, the Lord selects, commissions, and sends out 72 *other* followers to be workers in the harvest. Our verses serve as part of their “call documents.” First, it will be dangerous. I am not an expert, but I think wolves eat lambs. Jesus says that they are being sent out “into their midst.” Second, even more exacting terms—no money, or shoes, or stuff. Oh, and whatever you do, don’t greet anyone. Life on the road with Jesus is tough. Certainly, there are to be no distractions.

But we have to remember Jesus’ road. He had set his face. This was his road of destiny. These fully-empowered ambassadors were to proclaim that Jesus had turned toward Jerusalem, and his kingdom had drawn near. The time is at hand. The reign and rule of God is active, and this king is heading...to the cross. To die. And then to rise.

The way to the cross is exacting, devoid of possessions and fraught with peril. And it is lonely. Only one is able to walk it. This man, the Lord Jesus, goes his way alone, but sends out his workers to “gather the harvest”. Harvest time is at the end, right? Right. The reign and rule of God, in Jesus Christ, brings the end. “Heal the sick”, he says. Tell them the kingdom has come.

So, the Lord of the harvest sent out his workers to prepare his way, his road. This is no ordinary commission. But showing worldly foolishness, they were called to leave aside security, possessions, and their identity. Above all, the sent ones were to trust in the one who called them. Even in the midst of danger. Or hunger. Or poverty. They are reminded of their dependence...and their trust later in 22:35. “When I sent you out (with a commission) with no money pouch, or knapsack, or sandals, did you lack anything?” And they said, “Not one thing.”

Lord, help me always to trust in You no matter the situation. Give me strength to follow Jesus, who went the exacting way of the cross for the forgiveness of all my sins. Amen.

“The Foolishness of Discipleship”

Tuesday

Seminarian Bill Grueninger, 4th Year

March 6, 2018

Based on Luke 6:27-31

“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.” These words that Jesus spoke in our reading today seem foolish and counterproductive. In a world that is so polarized by different beliefs, everyone assumes that it is their right to put their thoughts first, their words first. Surely in a land of freedom of speech, each person should fight for the right to say their view the most often and with the most volume. But here in our reading, the One who has called us to come and follow Him, has called us to do the opposite of our culture. Love those who would attack you, do good to those who hate you. Christ calls us to the foolishness of not retaliating against those who do evil, and Christ calls us to places where there is potential hurt.

All too often though, it’s easy to do one of two things. First, it’s easy to ignore this uncomfortable command and fight for the last word with those who hurt us. “You say that? Well how 'bout this?” We make sure to either “one up” their insult, or at least stand up for ourselves. Secondly, it’s possible to receive the hurt that others give, and store it in the back of our mind, thinking, “fool me once...” It’s this attitude that helps us learn from our mistakes and build walls around our heart. Doing this allows us to create emotional and even physical distance from the one who hurts us.

Rather, let us fix our eyes on Jesus, who became a fool for us. He returns our insults with blessings and our abuses with forgiveness. He voluntarily placed himself in a position where he knew there would be hurt. Rather than creating distance between Himself and us, He comes to us and calls us to follow Him into the hurt, into the pain, knowing that His wounds can heal all wounds.

“The Foolishness of Discipleship”

Wednesday

March 7, 2018

Seminarian Jeremiah Jording, 4th Year

Based on Mark 10:21-22

Following Jesus can be a struggle. In this text, we are witnesses to a rich man who is told to sell all he has and follow Jesus. Would the Jews of his day not have agreed that the man had God's favor? After all, he claimed that he had kept the law since youth. And his wealth could be taken as evidence that God had blessed him in accordance with His promises, such as those in Deuteronomy 28. But the Son of God comes and reveals that the man hasn't kept the law fully. With a word He reveals the heart of the matter; the man's possessions have become his idol. He is guilty of breaking the First Commandment. "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come, follow me," Jesus says. The words render judgment and make an odd demand. Those present to this exchange must have thought this foolish, because who would sell all they had—all the many blessings God had given—in order to be poor and follow this man?

In our day, what does the world see of those who follow Christ? They see men and families that leave the world's view of success to go to Seminary. They see giving men and women up worldly wealth to feed the poor in our communities. They see staying up late at night to run a warming shelter for the homeless. All of these are but an outward sign of an inward change that has made us inheritors of eternal life: Christ's call and claim on our lives. As Christians, we say that helping others is our duty, and it is. We need to be wanting to help others, but to the world it seems foolish. Yet if we are honest with ourselves, we also have broken the first Commandment at times, putting other things ahead of following Christ, like the rich man did. But we rejoice that Christ's call and claim on us holds fast, as He invites us anew each day to heed His call and by daily contrition and repentance return to our baptism. For the last weeks of Lent we heed the call to repent for our sins of breaking the First Commandment, as the rich young man needed to do. But we also rejoice in our earthly foolishness, because God had made us wise unto salvation.

“The Foolishness of Discipleship”

Thursday

Seminarian Kendall Davis, 2nd Year

March 8, 2018

Based on Mark 8:34-35

Throughout our lives, we’re taught to be responsible. If you watch your grades, get into the right college, find the right career, make enough money, manage your finances well, cross your t’s and dot your i’s, then things will go well for you.

And for those of us here at the Seminary, if you learn your Greek and your Hebrew, learn the confessions, learn your systematic theology, learn how to preach well, learn all the proper relational and leadership skills, then you will be “successful” in ministry.

And to be sure, this is generally how life works. Responsibility and forward thinking usually result in success. If you seek to enhance your life, you can preserve it from unnecessary ruin, provided of course that you put forth enough effort.

But this is not always the case. As the writer of Ecclesiastes says, “The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I perceived that the same event happens to all of them” (1:14). No matter how wise and responsible we seek to be, we can never preserve our life, because we are not in control of our own destiny. As much as we like to think that we are in control, as Ecclesiastes says, “all is vanity and a striving after the wind” (v.14).

In Mark 8:34–35, Jesus gives us an invitation and a promise. He calls us to see that in seeking to hold on tightly to our life, we’ll only find it slipping through our fingers like grains of sand. Instead, he invites us to hold on tightly to His death, to hold on tightly to His cross. He promises that he will thereby give us true life. The only true life is the new life of the resurrection in Christ, and the only way to the resurrection is through the cross.

“The Foolishness of Discipleship”

Friday

Seminarian Ben Spaulding, 2nd Year

March 9, 2018

Based on Matthew 8:18-22

“Now when Jesus saw a crowd around him, he gave orders to go over to the other side. And a scribe came up and said to him, ‘Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.’ Another of the disciples said to him, ‘Lord, let me first go and bury my father.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.’”

My brothers and sisters, this text from Matthew can seem harsh. It seems too much and too foolish that Jesus could demand so much from those individuals in their specific situations. People approach Jesus and want to do the right thing with their own fantasies and desires of what could entail following the Son of Man, the One who is given full authority. Expect homelessness, expect to abandon family obligations. Is this the fantastic journey with Jesus? The aim is not about our desires nor expectations, no, Jesus says clearly, this is about My humiliation. This is about My purpose. My ways will not be yours.

At times, there are things in our lives that come together at a cross roads. Do I get a good grade in this class and make sure I remain at the top academically? I want to be the best professor, the smartest, the most liked, but what if I’m sacrificing some friendships, my marriage, even my family while doing it? What does following Jesus look like when I’m asked to give up things that frankly seem like they are God-pleasing and best right now, at least to me. We wrestle with these demands of Jesus for those who would follow Him, and we struggle with our own issues as we follow our Lord, which are not as neat and tidy as we want them to be.

Let us not forget when it gets hard and when we fall over in our sin and wrestle with our own expectations, that this same Jesus invites us to lay our heads down at His mercy seat, trusting in His presence, trusting in His listening ear, trusting in His strength, trusting in His redemptive work for us as we follow Him day after day. Christ gives us rest amid a life that seems foolish, burdensome, and costly. We shall have a home in Him who freely gives it to us by His own mercy and grace.