

## **“Jesus Is Looking For A Few Good Disciples.”**

### **Luke 14 : 25-33**

Often times at a public event... such at one of the summer performances of our Kiel Municipal Band ...or as in the case of last weekend -- at a rodeo.....the emcee will ask any veterans in attendance to please stand and be recognized for their service.

During one such event with the Kiel Municipal Band, Jeff Rabe asked the veterans of our various armed services to stand when the Kiel band played the song representing their particular branch of the service.

As I looked around, I noticed various members of St. Peter's who are veterans, each stood as the song from their service was played. These situations always make me feel a little bit awkward. Why? Because technically, I can stand for two different songs -- for I have served in two different branches of our armed forces: I have served in the Marine Corps as well as in the Army. Typically, I stand up for just one of them and alternate it a little....taking turns which branch of the service I'll stand up for that day. I do it that way because I don't enjoy having to explain to curious people how

I wound up in two different branches of the military. My story is a long story, and I won't tell it here. Please don't ask me to explain it in the greeting line after worship either, because that isn't the time for involved questions that require an involved answer.

Let me just say that I was not kicked out of either service, I was never court martialed, and that I served honorably in both the Marine Corps and the Army. Further, I am very proud of what I did in both of those organizations. For that matter, I am proud of our men and women who serve and who have served in all other branches as well! I believe that their cause is a noble cause!

For those of you who have ever been in the armed forces, do you remember that day when you first arrived at basic training? Or Boot Camp, as most of us call it? Of course you do! It was a huge reality check!

They cut your hair....they issued you uniforms....and you were told that you were in something called "A" Company or "B" Company or some other similar sounding term. They marched you around the base. They double-timed you everywhere. It was part of your transition from civilian to military.

The young man or woman fresh out of high school or college who goes into the armed forces makes a startling discovery: mom and dad aren't there to take care of them anymore. Neither are grandma and grandpa, or aunt Sue and Uncle Bob. Why? Because military service isn't a job for children; it's a job for grown-ups. And that means standing on your own two feet and taking responsibility for yourself -- and eventually for the others around you. **Here is what we need to see at the outset:** *It is all about making a commitment and keeping that commitment.* The armed forces expects its

members to be totally committed to the overall mission. They don't want anyone going halfway -- it's all or nothing.

According to the New Testament, it would appear that this is also what Jesus expects of those of us who claim to be his followers. *Total commitment.*

Once again the lectionary brings us a very difficult Bible passage! Jesus 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."* Hate?!? And hate our own family?!? Are we hearing Jesus right, here?

But He doesn't stop there. He goes further: *"Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."* Oh, great! Now He wants you and me to pick up that awful wooden cross and walk with Him out to Golgatha!

And then, here's the icing on the cake: *"So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions."* What's going on here?!? Give up my house? (I'm always curious about how people from more literal-interpretative traditions handle this particular passage!)

Let me just give you the bottom line: Jesus **isn't** saying that He wants you to literally hate your own family -- or anyone else for that matter. I like that bumper sticker going around that says, "Who Would Jesus Hate?" He also isn't saying that you have to be homeless, naked, and starving.

What He **is** talking about is total commitment. You see, friends, Jesus isn't looking for casual Christians -- He's looking for committed ones. Jesus doesn't call us to be Sunday brunch Christians -- He calls us to be daily disciples. Jesus is looking for people who are serious about their faith and who live their daily lives being informed by that very faith. Jesus is looking for a few good disciples! Jesus often used hyperbole in order to get people's attention. Now that He's got ours, He is calling us to be totally committed!

A while back Will Willimon, the former Dean of the Chapel down at Duke University, got a call from an upset parent, a VERY upset parent. "I hold you personally responsible for this," he said.

"Me?" Will asked.

The father was hot, upset because his graduate school bound daughter had just informed him that she was going to chuck it all ("throw it all away" was the way the father described it) and go do mission work with the Presbyterians in Haiti. "Isn't that absurd!" shouted the father. "A BS degree in mechanical engineering from Duke and she's going to dig ditches in Haiti."

"Well, I doubt that she's received much training in the Engineering Department here for that kind of work, but she's probably a fast learner and will probably get the hang of ditch-digging in a few months," Will said.

"Look," said the father, "this is no laughing matter. You are completely irresponsible to have encouraged her to do this. I hold you personally responsible," he said.

As the conversation went on, Dr. Willimon pointed out that the well-meaning but obviously unprepared parents were the ones who had started this ball rolling. THEY were the ones who had her baptized, read Bible stories to her, took her to Sunday School, let her go with the Presbyterian Youth Fellowship. Will said, "You're the one who introduced her to Jesus, not me."

"But all we ever wanted her to be was a Presbyterian," said the father, meekly. (1) (O-KAY. )

Friends, being a "Presbyterian" isn't enough. Just being UCC isn't enough. Just being a church member isn't enough. Jesus Christ is calling you and me to a radical lifestyle. He is calling us to be His disciples in our daily lives, wherever our daily lives may find us. That doesn't mean that you have to go dig ditches in Haiti. But it might mean that you read stories to second graders in New Holstein, or take groceries to a shut-in in Kiel. It could mean that you stop to visit with a newcomer out here in our lounge, or it might mean that you sign up for LIHN. And...we do it because we belong to Christ. It also means that we are committed to daily prayer and attendance at weekly worship. And it means that we support Christ's church with our time and our talent, and with our financial giving. Christianity isn't a religion for the casual -- it is a relationship for the committed.

Have you ever wondered what eventually became of Jesus' original twelve disciples? (Aside from Judas Iscariot.) They were mostly martyred for their faith. In the days when it was against the law to be a Christian, they refused to renounce their faith in Jesus Christ...and they paid for it with their lives. Here is what happened to them:

Andrew died on a cross

Simon Peter was crucified -- upside down.

Bartholomew was flayed to death.

James (son of Zebedee) was beheaded.

The other James (son of Alphaeus) was beaten to death.

Thomas was run through with a lance.

Matthias was stoned and then beheaded.

Matthew was slain by the sword.

Thaddeus was shot to death with arrows.

Philip was hanged.

Only John made it through alive but he was exiled to a small island in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea.

Friends, I've met a lot of people who have told me that they admire Jesus. But Jesus never called people to be His admirers -- He called them to be His followers. And that is just as true today as it was then. You and I each have a choice: We can admire Jesus from a distance, keeping Him neatly tucked away between Sunday brunch and opening kick-off -- or -- we can pick up our cross and walk the dusty trails with Him in our everyday lives.

Where will YOU stand at the last day? When the roll is called of those who are "veterans" of God's mission in the world.....will you stand as one who answered the call of Christ? AMEN.

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(1). William H. Willimon, *Pulpit Resource*, Sept.10, 1995