

Sermon: Weeding Out the Crowd**Scripture: Luke 14:25-33****Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans****Date: September 8, 2019**

It's an interesting scripture that we are given on this day, this first Sunday of the new church program year when we are welcoming you back from a summer of vacations and encouraging those of you who haven't been around to reconnect with your church family. Interesting, because Jesus is decidedly not gathering people in but weeding people out.

Especially in the Gospel of Luke but also elsewhere we get a sense that Jesus is not a big fan of crowds (**slide - crowd**). He often seems to be on just this side of running away from them – calling the disciples away to talk to them privately, (**slide - man alone**) going up to the mountain to pray by himself while people are looking for him, jumping on a boat to separate himself for a time, telling the people he heals not to let word get out about him. He never said “where two or more are gathered there I am”, like he's often misquoted as saying, he says very specifically “where two or three are there I am also.” It was the crowds that landed his mother and father in a stable rather than a room at his birth and it was the crowds he stood before who chanted “crucify him” at his death. (**slide - cross and crowd**) No, crowds generate much too much group think and group emotion tending toward the lowest common denominators of human behavior for Jesus to be much interested. He was working at a much subtler level to transform hearts.
(slide - woman with jars)

Jesus was never looking for his words and actions to go viral through the masses and as this scripture makes clear he in fact works in the opposite direction to weed out the crowd, to keep just a remnant for the journey ahead. At this point in the Gospel, Jesus is on the road to Jerusalem (**slide - hillside**) and while he knows what's facing him there, the crowd that's following him has no idea! That, I imagine, is why he turns to them and says what he says:

“To go where I’m going you might as well hate the people around you, hate your very life itself, cause you’re going to be giving it all up. Take up your cross. Give all your possessions and come on and follow me.”

Can you imagine, people were probably like;

“Oh, wait a minute, I think I forgot something back at home!”

“I was just going to this next town anyway.” (**slide**)

“I thought I would follow, but...

Jesus weeding out the crowd. (**slide – Jesus alone**)

And even though honestly we might be more with those who drift away back to the comfort of their homes and the regular routine of their lives, we also can't dismiss Jesus' challenge as being simply for the elite disciples, for he puts his finger on a core spiritual principle that is equally applicable to all of us, from suburban dwelling Americans of the 21st century to desert dwelling aesthetics of the 4th century and that is.... that there is a higher order that holds sway beyond the superficial orders of this world, that we must be responsive to. There is a higher call to us within - and at times beyond - the immediate responsibilities of our lives and this higher order can require the sacrifice of the

superficial order at times making our lives pretty uncomfortable. (**slide - man pointing behind**). God, the Good, the Right, Truth, requires our allegiance and devotion at times at the expense of our comfort and security and well being and even at times at the expense of our families, our tribal loyalties, our country.

There are of course so many dramatic awe-inspiring examples of this found in the stories of people who risked their lives to harbor Jews from the Nazi's (**slide - shadowy soldiers**) or those who made of their homes a stop on the underground railroad, or others who risk their livelihood to blow the whistle on corrupt corporate practices or abusive bosses; examples of those who embrace the truth of themselves as gay or trans despite the fracturing of their families or those risking life and limb to stand against environmental abuse.

Those are the dramatic examples that most of us are awed and moved by but would we take that road? Would we follow such conviction all the way through to such sacrifice and consequence? But there are smaller moments too where we are asked to stand for truth, to respond with care, to hold out with integrity, to do what is right even though no one is looking, to challenge what is even a little wrong... and sometimes those smaller moments and the inconvenience of them can be daunting too and maybe they contribute as much to the reign of God's higher order as the greater moments.

Jesus asks, will you take up your cross and follow me? (**slide - man being grabbed**) Will you prioritize what is honest and true, good and right, in smaller and greater ways, whatever the cost may be? It takes intentional quiet and prayer (**slide - praying**) to even notice the

moments sometimes, to silence the voice of the crowd and recognize the whispers of God ... but we can build that muscle of responding to God's higher order in the smaller ways so that when and if the larger demand comes, the one that says "actually, drop your nets, drop ALL your doing, and follow me," we might consider doing that too. **(slide - beckoning hand)**