

Luke 14:25-35  
September 4, 2016

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

Amanda's grandma, who was Norwegian through and through had a saying when something unfortunate happened, when perhaps she smelt something less than pleasing, or even when she bit into something that tasted like it had been scraped off the underside of one's shoe and that word was "uff da." But there were also those rare occasions when she would break out another phrase. In a quick internet search I found nothing on this phrase and for all I know it could literally mean, "Good day"; yet, clearly that is not the context in which she would use it. The phrase was, "veta meg (??)" and it seemed to me that its usage was applicable when "uff da" just wasn't quite strong enough and this morning I think a case could be made to respond to our gospel text with , "veta meg!" Truthfully, it's probably much better than what may have come to our minds if we were to respond in English.

Let's not try to sugar coat it, gloss over it, or skirt around it. Let's just confront it head on and call this passage for what it is – tough! It's like a foul smell that leaves us plugging our noses and hightailing it for the door in order to find fresh air. It certainly is not the first passage myself or any other pastor would choose voluntarily to preach on. Because honestly I continue to struggle with this passage. How can I stand up here and

preach on it when I love my family so much? Or because of how much I treasure some of my personal belongings. It's challenging and tough stuff and that is what faith is.

Faith in Jesus Christ is not easy. To truly follow Jesus as he calls us to, as he teaches us to, as he himself exemplifies for us, and even as he commands us to do is difficult – if not humanly impossible. Jesus continually lifts up the fact that nothing will be impossible with God. And perhaps that is part of what Jesus is lifting up in this passage. You see, three times the phrase “not able to be my disciple” is stated exactly the same way in the original Greek language; however, the NRSV translation we read states it slightly different in that two times (v. 26 and 27) it is translated as “cannot be my disciple” and the third time (v.33) as “none of you can become my disciple (if you do not give up all your possessions)”. Perhaps Jesus knows the impossibility to that which He is calling those first followers to. Perhaps, he is using a bit of hyperbolic language – that is he is making an exaggerated statement to make a point. A magnification not to be taken literally but in an effort to open our eyes to the realization that following Jesus is going to entail tough stuff. It is going to ask demanding questions of us. It is going to force us to confront all that we cling to for comfort, safety, and life. It is going to lead us places we don't want to go. Remember the context in which Jesus utters these words. He has set his face upon Jerusalem. He is going to the cross. It will not be an easy trip. It will not end well. It will result in agonizing pain. It will come with a cost. Are his disciples and the large crowds following truly willing to go there? Do they fully

understand what is at stake? Recall also that his disciples do find it impossible. Peter denies him. Judas betrays him. They all desert him as he dies on a cross. Thus, perhaps Jesus and Luke as he recounts this story are lifting up the fact that following Jesus is impossible. If we are honest, are we truly willing to give up everything? Are we truly able to forgive time and time and time again as Jesus commands? Are we truly able to love our neighbor unconditionally as Jesus loves us? Returning to that phrase “not able to be my disciple” repeated three times in this text gives us somewhat of a clue to making sense of what Jesus may be getting at. Pastor and scholar Brian Stoffregen points out, “The word for ‘able’ with the negative generally carries with it the meaning of ‘not being able’ to do something. That is, it refers to something that is impossible for one to do.”<sup>i</sup>

Perhaps, on our own, it is indeed impossible to follow Jesus. We will fail. That’s not easy to admit is it – that we can’t do something. That we need help. That takes humility to confess those words. Humility Jesus lifted up last week as he told those invited to a great banquet to take the worst seats at the table. But just perhaps Jesus knows that when we finally confess these words, admit we can’t do it alone, admit it is impossible for us to turn against those we love so dearly, admit we can’t comprehend how we can give up everything, admit we are scared to go where he is going and like the disciples may not be able to accompany him all the way to the foot of the cross, admit we are fragile human beings due to the sinful nature within each of us – then and only

then do we truly open ourselves up to the transforming work of God's grace. Then and only then do we finally surrender to the tempting voices that say we can do it alone. Then and only then do we throw ourselves face down on the floor before the cross and confess we need Jesus and only Jesus to save us, to rescue us, to guide our lives, and to help us do what is only possible through God. Then and only then do we admit money can't buy everything. Family isn't the source of life and our identity as it was often viewed in Jesus' day. Then and only then do we let our heart be good soil and allow the potter's hands to grow something magnificent from that soil.

You see, we can't follow Jesus on our own despite what some others might say. We need Jesus. We need his Spirit to instill in us even the tiniest seed of faith to believe and follow. We need the forgiveness he freely offers each and every time we turn from him and try and do it alone. We need the grace offered by him each time we mess up, each time we fail, each time we choose something other than his way of love, forgiveness, mercy, justice, compassion, and peace and instead give into the temptation of sin that lead us to wet our appetites with selfishness, greed, betrayal, envy, lust, and a host of others. We need God to do the impossible. We need God to come to us and say, "Child, you are forgiven." "Child, you are loved." "Child, try again." And indeed God does exactly that in the meal we are about to share together, in the waters of baptism where Christ claims us as his own, and on the fateful journey to the cross Jesus set his face toward and undertook for all creation. For humans it is impossible to fully

grasp the scope, breadth, and width of God's grace, love, and forgiveness; however, Jesus knew it, lived it, and breathed it and He will did the unthinkable so we could catch a glimpse of that amazing grace.

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<sup>i</sup> Brian Stoffregen; "CrossMarks" [www.crossmarks.com](http://www.crossmarks.com)