

September 8, 2019 (God's work. Our Hands. Sunday)

Luke 14:25-33

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

Each year, we gather with many other congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America on a special Sunday known as "God's work. Our hands." As part of that Sunday, the ELCA provides several resources and one of those is sermon notes for the day. As has been done in the past, I share with you those notes on our appointed Gospel lesson.

*How does following Jesus transform us? What are we willing to give up? On this day when we pray that we may do God's work with our hands, these are the questions Jesus pointedly asks us.*

*In our Gospel, we join a crowd following Jesus, people much like us who are already committed to walking with him, only to have Jesus look over his shoulder and say some difficult things. Which relationships will we give up, and which ones will we nurture? How will we give away our possessions, our standing, our comfort? The desire to follow is good, but do we understand where he is going and what it costs?*

*Jesus' words by themselves sound harsh, and they're meant to be jarring. Being Christ followers, being church in the world, is not a simple hobby that leaves the rest of our lives as we would order them. Discipleship will disrupt us, personally and communally, in ways that feel like grief and loss even as we are drawn into new relationships with God and neighbor. We are explicitly called away from possessions and money, from relationships that we prioritize over God, from our lives revolving around ourselves and our own comfort, and into following Jesus, who suffered and who sacrificed all those things for the sake of love. This call to count the cost, on a day when many congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are turning outward to serve neighbors, raises some pointed questions: Who are we going to be as church? What will be our highest good? Who is Jesus leading us toward, and what is Jesus leading us away from? What will this journey cost us, and what new life will God use it to create?*

*These words are not spoken in a vacuum; they are spoken within the full arc of what it means to be disciples. Hovering at the edges of today's text are desire and new life: the desire to be near Jesus that has drawn this crowd (and us) to follow him and the new life he brings us through this path of transformation. Jesus always goes ahead of us. Any suffering or loss, any letting go of pride, greed, comfort, or status that we are called into is something he has already walked through. We are called to the cost of discipleship and its path to the cross, but that same path leads to resurrection. Jesus does not call us to suffering and sacrifice for their own sake but for the sake of justice and mercy and our own need to be reformed as God's people again and again.*

*Abundant life for the whole of creation is always God's gift and aim, and the truth Jesus shares here is that God's vision clashes with business as usual. This may sound harsh, but the simple truth is that we cannot put both ourselves and God first. When we as church offer our work and prayer, we offer ourselves up to transformation, and Jesus knows that, wherever we may be starting, today we are in for a change.*

*In conclusion, I suspect many of us read or hear this passage proclaimed and fixate on or are even derailed by Jesus' difficult call to "hate" family. Many scholars believe Jesus is employing hyperbole here (an extravagant and exaggerated statement not to be taken literally) to get our attention. Many note the Greek word "miseo" translated as "hate," can also have a more comparative meaning of "to love less [than something else]." Whatever the exact meaning, this is less a command to hate the people we love than a call to radically reprioritize our relationships based on discipleship.<sup>i</sup>*

In a few seconds we will sing a song composed specifically for this day and aptly titled "God's Work, Our Hands."<sup>ii</sup> As I read the above summary of our gospel passage and the words of this song, I was drawn to the last few words of each verse, "...as we work in your name; ... as we follow in your way; ... as we speak in your name; ... as we answer your call." Why do we do these things? Why do we prioritize our time on Sunday morning to be here? Why do we make an egg casserole, put on a pair of work gloves, tie a knot on another quilt, craft together a greeting card, paint a gazebo, wash siding, trim a tree, pull some weeds, give an offering, etc.?

We make it a priority because Jesus made us a priority. He made our neighbor a priority. Even the neighbor we do not know. He made the world God created a priority. The good news of his love, forgiveness, and grace indeed has changed us and in so doing we strive to work in his name, follow in his way, answer his call so that we share that same good news with the world.

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<sup>i</sup> From ELCA.org worship resources for God's work, our hands Sunday, September 8, 2019.

<sup>ii</sup> *God's Work, Our Hands*; Text: Wayne L. Wold; Music: Earth and All Stars, David N. Johnson; Text © 2019 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, admin. Augsburg Fortress; Music © 1968 Augsburg Publishing House, admin. Augsburg Fortress.