

Would Jesus be Elected President?

It is Presidential election time again and the candidates are out stumping for votes. But these days' politicians are packaged very tightly and coached on what to say in just about every situation. Imagine Jesus running for president. I can just hear his Political advisor saying something like this to him. Jesus, I have some experience in handling the careers of public figures like yourself. You have potential to be a great leader for much needed change in our society, but I believe you need to be careful in what you do and how you say things. The crowds love to hear you speak, but wouldn't it be great if we had advance people preceding your schedule to make sure the crowds were holding the right signs? You definitely need someone to work with the press, so you get adequate and positive coverage of these great rallies. There is talk of quite a few people who could give substantial contributions to your cause, if you just led them to believe they would benefit down the road. Now, considering what you reportedly said the other day about folks having to hate their families and life itself, and having to carry the cross in order to follow you—I just hope that was quoted out of context. Jesus we're going to have to work on your sound bites; you're going to get crucified if you keep making statements like that. In order to be a leader, you've got to mold your speeches to show you're in touch with the latest public opinion polls. We need someone to do spin control for you and stamp out the fires of controversy before you get burned by some misstatement.

Do you think that such advice would fit with Jesus' character? Most likely if Jesus ever got that kind of advice during his ministry, he would have ignored it. However the advice Jesus receives does express the frustration I sometimes feel, as a Pastor, with Jesus' lack of willingness to go with the flow.

Luke tells us that large crowds were starting to travel with Jesus. Didn't he understand human nature enough to know that you've got to tell people mostly what they want to hear in order for them to keep following? The crowds were ready to sign on, so why the hard comments about family and crosses?

Well this needs some explaining. First, the statement about hating one's parents, spouse, children, and siblings was not as harsh to his listeners as it sounds to us. The verb "to hate" can mean to turn away from or to detach oneself from. This is quite a different expression from what is communicated by the word hate. For throughout scripture, people of faith are encouraged time after time to love, to nourish, to care for their families. When Jesus talks about hating life itself, this is not calling for abuse of ourselves in any shape or form. Rather, the strong language gets our attention and challenges all who would be disciples of Jesus Christ to look again at their priorities and commitments.

The two stories in our text ask a related question: "Is the price of discipleship more than you are willing to pay?" Whether one is building a tower, as in our first story, or building a nation, as in the second, the costs of time, energy, resources, and life itself must be taken into consideration. Will I be able to follow through on my decision? Jesus was riding a wave of enthusiasm that he knew would not last. He called his followers to look ahead to the costs and the difficulties. As the pressure mounts to grow the membership here at First Trinity one is tempted to avoid the difficult message about the costs involved in living out the Christian. Lets make it sound like it is easy to be a Christian "Let's soft pedal what we expect of people." "We don't want to scare anyone off." The problem with this kind of theology is that it implies that what we are doing is not very important. The message communicated is that you really don't have to do your best in service to the Lord. As stewards of the talents and possessions God has

placed in our care, our Christian call is demanding. We need to be honest about that. Jesus said, "The cost may be high." Jesus said, "Your priorities have to change. To follow me you have to be willing to carry the cross."

Luke has a brief saying about salt that follows the stories about counting the cost. For just as a commitment to follow Christ can erode over time, salt can gradually lose its flavor. Enthusiasm will fade at times. Other priorities creep back to challenge our primary commitment to Christ. As has been said, "salt does not decide to become pepper; it just gradually loses its savor. The process can be so gradual, in fact, that no one really notices. Well, almost no one." The cost of discipleship is high. But if you and I are as committed to our faith as many others are committed to building towers or fighting wars, then we will accept the cost and continue to follow. However, when we grow concerned that we might not have the wherewithal to continue following, remember that we are not the only ones who have counted the cost and said, "Yes." Jesus' parable also implies that if a mere mortal would not be so foolish as to begin building operations without sufficient capital, or so foolish as to go to war without the faintest hope of success, then would God be so foolish as to begin a venture that could not be completed? God has begun to work building your life and mine. God has engaged the struggle for us, knowing full well the cost and God is at work enabling our journey as disciples. That's the only way you and I can be worth our salt.

In 1996 the Bridger Wilderness area near the Grant Tetons in Wyoming surveyed campers and hikers regarding their wilderness area, here are some of their actual responses. Trails need to be reconstructed. Please avoid building trails that go uphill. Too many bugs and leeches and spiders and spider webs. Please spray the wilderness to rid the areas of these pests. Please pave the trails...Chair lifts need to be in some places so that we can get to wonderful views without having to hike to them. The coyotes made too much noise last night and kept me

awake. Please eradicate these annoying animals. A small deer came into my camp and stole my jar of pickles. Is there a way I can get reimbursed? Please call... Escalators would help on steep uphill sections. A MacDonald's would be nice at the trailhead. Too many rocks in the mountains. Citation: Mike Neifert, *Light and Life* (February 1997), p. 27 These comments indicate that the people who made them do not really understand what it means to stay in a "wilderness area." They were looking for something convenient and comfortable, but not truly a wilderness experience. In a similar way, many people today do not understand what it means to be a genuine Christian. There are many past and present who follow Jesus and claimed to be Christian but they do so on their terms and not his. Following Jesus on our terms is not a disciple.

Following Jesus may be risky. It may even be costly. You and I may lose some of our popularity, but we may gain an understanding of what gives us real value as human beings. We may lose some of our luxuries, but we might gain understanding of the difference between cost and value. So let's keep following this one called the Christ. Let us renew our commitment to God. As we continue on, we will be on a journey that needs no buildup, or positive spin or campaign manager, for we will be journeying with the Lord of life—the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of all humankind. Friends, with every step of faith we take, we are in for the adventure of our lives. Amen