

Year B, February 25, 2018
2 Lent
Christ Church, Mexia

O Lord, grant that we may know what we must do as disciples of Jesus and be given the will and strength to do so. Amen

A long time ago in Vietnam, my first sergeant told me, "Lieutenant, if you're doing your job, somebody is not going to like you." It makes perfect sense. When you're doing your job, you're going to make someone do something they don't want to do, or keep them from doing something they want to do. I wonder if Jesus felt that way when he was talking with his disciples and the crowd with them in today's gospel reading?

Dallas Willard once noted in *Christianity Today* that, "The word 'disciple' occurs 269 times in the New Testament. 'Christian' is found three times, and was first introduced to refer precisely to the disciples." He continued, "The disciple of Jesus is not the deluxe or heavy-duty model of the Christian – especially padded, textured, streamlined, and empowered for the fast lane on the straight and narrow way. He (or she simply) stands on the pages of the New Testament as the first level of basic transportation in the kingdom of God." The disciples were ordinary people called to do extraordinary work. You and I are called to do that same work. We most likely don't want to hear that, but it's true.

As Hulitt Gloer so beautifully wrote in the *Daily Feast*, "As long as self reigns, we will forever be seeking painless shortcuts to the kingdom. We will try and try again to substitute another way for the way of the cross. But only when we deny self and take up the cross can we follow Jesus. All our attempts to save our lives are futile. All our efforts to make another way are the denial of the one who showed us the way, the way of the cross. This is true discipleship. In the end, true messiahship and true discipleship are inextricably connected. When we are finally willing to accept Jesus for who he is, the suffering one who lays down his life for others, then (then) we can understand who we are to be, and denying self, we can take up the cross and follow him."

On the cover of a powerful new book, *The Underground Church: Reclaiming the Subversive Way of Jesus*, Archbishop Desmond Tutu asks, "When was the last time you thought of going to church as dangerous? Once we challenged the status quo; now we mostly defend it."

Jesus was a subversive. That's why the Romans crucified him. He was countercultural. That's why the Jewish leaders feared him. He challenged the status quo, and Jesus wants us to do the same when and where it is necessary. Robin Meyers, the author of the book, describes Jesus as "a dangerous subversive, not because he wanted to help individuals to escape a perishing world and make it 'up' to heaven, but because he wanted to bring heaven's justice 'down' to earth, especially to free those who suffered injustice and oppression."

That is what Jesus is talking about today – doing that kind of work requires selfless devotion. It requires us to be more like the early church. Jesus was telling the disciples, who had only recently begun to understand that he was the Messiah, that he had to suffer rejection and shame and death in order to accomplish his mission. For him, the way to peace is not through war or domination as our culture tends to think. He had the power to make it work that way. That's why Satan tempted him in the desert to demonstrate his power. To use his power for something other than God had intended. And that's probably why he got mad with Peter, who was acting like Satan – a friend tempting him, because Peter and others thought the mission should be accomplished by violent force. Too often that is the thinking of humanity. Even our churches have supported war in the past. The Christian churches of Germany, for the most part, supported Hitler in his rise to power. Such an approach tends to be exclusive – us and them.

On the contrary, Jesus and the early church were radically inclusive. Jesus mingled and ate with everyone, gentile and Jew, clean and unclean. The early church welcomed the poor and the "nobodies" to worship with the rich and "somebodies" – all people were welcome and they practiced voluntary redistribution of wealth – certainly a radical concept for most people today, they rejected violence as the tool of injustice. Is it that way of the church today?

Quoting Joseph Small: "The truth about who God is contradicts what we expect on the basis of our own feelings about divinity. The truth is that God's mercy is given to sinners, not reserved for the righteous; God's strength is exposed in weakness, not displayed in power; God's wisdom is veiled in parable and paradox, not set out in self-help maxims; God's life is disclosed in death. ... God is not conformed to human expectations or desires, for God is found in uncertainty, danger and suffering...precisely where human wisdom perceives God's absence."

The early church was guided by the unifying spirit of God, not by theology and doctrine and creeds. "It was a spirit of generosity, mercy, healing, hope and radical hospitality." During this Lenten period, dare we resolve to be led

by that spirit today? Dare we stand up against injustice, as God defines injustice? Dare we give up comfort and preservation of self, in order to be true disciples of Christ?

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word and the Spirit.

Amen