18th Sunday after Trinity
STEWARDSHIP SERMON
Rolling Meadows - 1965

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

St. Luke 14: 25-35

SPECTATOR OR DISCIPLE?

Today I want to speak to you candidly and pointedly about the cost of discipleship. Tomorrow the Voters' Assembly of our congregation meets. Typical meeting - 15-20 people. It does take any extrasensory perception to know that with that kind of participation we are not meeting the tasks and opportunities that God has set before us. For years now we have been trying to enlist many of you personally and individually to respond to the calling of the Spirit of God to use your talents and abilities in the service of Christ and His Church. There have been some fine and faithful answers to the call, but for the most part they have been meagre and minimal. The majority have been quite content to sit on the sidelines - to watch - to complain and criticize perhaps - but not to get involved. If what we are doing in the life of our congregation - its Voters' meetings, its boards and committees, its organizations and activities - is not the work of Christ; if we are not witnesses and ambassadors for Christ to one another, to our community, to the whole world; if this is all only a lot of pious fuss and frittle and busy work with no real meaning or purpose -- then we need a Jeremiah or a John the Baptist to call us to repentance and to return again to the things that really matter. But in no case can this ever be a pretext for being uninvolved - for being a spectator rather than a disciple.

Too often churches are judged today by their size, the number of people they attract, their statistical reports - rather than the number of individual disciples, people, men & women - boys & girls who have counted the cost and are willing to pay the price of being disciples. Judged by the crowds He attracted, Christ's early ministry could be called a huge success. Five thousand men, besides women and children, came to hear Him in the desert. People pressed in upon Him in such great numbers at the shores of the lake that He had to go out in a boat to address them. If this is what He wanted, He had it. If His followers at that time were as much impressed by crowds as some of those who claim adherence to Christ today, they were probably congratulating themselves and saying to each other, We've got it made. To their

dismay Christ made it perfectly evident that He was not impressed by crowds. On when great crowds were accompanying Him, He turned to them and said, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, even his own life, he cannot be a disciple of Mine. No one who does not carry his cross and come with Me can be a disciple of Mine."

Our Lord did not despise crowds. He did not turn the crowds aside. He was not snobbish. He loved people because He was concerned about all of them. He loved people to such an extent that He forgot Himself entirely. In love He laid down His life for the life of the whole world. But, at the same time, He made it perfectly clear that following Him, being a disciple, requires participation. If anyone, said Christ, If anyone comes to me... He was talking to individuals in that crowd, knowing that crowds prefer the role of spectators. If anyone comes to Me and wants to be a follower of Mine, he has to abandon the role of spectator and become a disciple. Christ wants not onlookers but participants; not admirers but martyrs; not church members but followers; not spectators but disciples. Christ wants us to come down from the balcony into the arena - where once more it becomes hard, gloriously hard, to be a Christian - where it costs a man all that he has and all that he is, his very life as a living sacrifice. Christianity is not a spectator sport; Christianity must be either hated or loved; it cannot be simply watched. There is no room for Christianity in the balcony. There is no passion there and no commitment.

It is popular today and even fashionable to belong to a church. But it is no more popular today than it was 2000 years ago to take Christ seriously. People don't mind belonging to church or even going to services on Sunday - if they can lose themselves in the crowd, if they can slip in and out without having to do anything. They want a little bit of God, but not too much. They want a bit of eternity, but not so much that it may seriously disturb them or cause them to make a radical about face. Elton Trueblood tells the story of a man who applied for membership in a certain church. He told the pastor that he wanted to belong to a fashionable church, listen to good sermons, and hear good music. But,

being a busy man, he had no intention of doing any work or giving any time as an active participant in the work of the church. The pastor replied, Sir, you have come to the wrong place. The one you want is six blocks down the street. Thank ing him, the man hurried on and walked right into a cemetery.

Following Christ has a price. Take a good look at it and count the co: before you leap. Otherwise you will make a fool of yourself as did the man who started to build a tower and found his neighbors jeering at him: There's the man who started to build and could not finish. Or the king who went out to do battl and found himself seeking terms for peace before the battle had ever begun in order to avoid abject surrender. Count the cost! Discipleship involves radical surgery. With the sharp edge of the surgeon's scalpel Christ cuts deep. He cut out every other interest, every other love, every other relationship. If you war to follow Me and if you set any real value on what this discipleship gives to you then you must also make a radical change in your life. Then you must say good-by to many things to which you cling. If you do not, you will only be a man who has been scratched by the flimflam of respectable Christianity which is no Christiani at all. Then you would have been better off to have stayed away altogether. Jesus wants no half-way Christian, no mere hangers-on, no nominal Christians. He wants a man hot or cold, but not lukewarm.

Count the cost! Christ is simply not satisfied with external lip-servi and half-hearted devotion. He wants your whole heart and your whole life. He is satisfied with nothing less than commitment - commitment now - to Him - as a disciple. Being a disciple of Christ does not mean giving up a few bad habits or changing the pattern of one's life for an hour on Sunday morning and, perhaps, on evening a month. Being a disciple of Christ means giving up the dearest and the best if they stand in the way of discipleship. Christ demands of His disciples that they give up the very things they treasure the most: If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.

Of course, you don't have to look very far to find those who out of self-interest hate their parents, their wives and children, their brothers and

sisters. There are many people who hate their own life so much that they don't want to go on living. Such hatred, however, does not bring a person closer to Christ. The hatred of which Christ is speaking does not arise out of self-inter but out of self-denial. An athlete in training to break the four-minute mile, for example, learns to hate some things: foods which will cause him to put on weight and thus rob him of his efficiency; parties which will keep him out late at night and prevent him from getting the proper rest; the things which under nor mal circumstances he could do and enjoy and which now he will have to deny himself. To be a disciple of Christ calls for self-denial and for a love so great that it makes every other affection, no matter how wonderful and good it may be, look like hatred by comparison. The first impulse, the first value, the first service, the first affection must belong to Christ, to Him alone. All other relationships must take their place behind this one. This is true discipleship; true religion, in Christ's language. Everything else is make-believe. A man's whole heart has to be with Christ; otherwise he is only a spectator. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away; behold, all thing are become new.

When we have thus surrendered ourselves and everything we hold near and dear to Jesus, He always gives it all back to us renewed and transformed. That means that we can now love ourselves, our fathers and mothers, husbands and wives brothers and sisters in Christ. This love is altogether new and positive. Let me illustrate this by talking for a moment about my office as a Christian pastor. Here I stand before you as a preacher. Believe me, it tickles the Old Adam in me to be able to stand before you in this pulpit and have you all listen to me. My old Adam quite naturally loves the feeling of pride and power and acclaim. And perhaps after the service you may say, Ah, didn't he preach beautifully today? And that too makes me feel good. And because I know myself and this Old Adam in me, I know that the devil can take even the love I have for you and so pollute an corrupt it that it becomes nothing more vain glory. Therefore as a preacher I

must pray in the sacristy before the service, as Elias Schrenk used to do: Sprinkle me thoroughly with Thy blood that the adversary may not approach me. Protected by that prayer, the congregation then becomes a different thing to the preacher. It is no longer an audience he sees beneath his pulpit. Now he sees people, people for whom Jesus Christ suffered bitter death and whom He purchased at great price. Then he must say in his heart: Now you must call to these peopl clearly and urgently, so that they will see what is at stake; that they have an eternity to lose and that Jesus may have died in vain.

Isn't that what every earnest Christian must be about? Isn't that why we cannot possibly stand on the side-lines, but why we must get involved - why w must give our time, and talents, and abilities, and all that we are to the cause and mission of this Jesus who has given everything to us? He died for all - for you and me - that they which live - you and me - should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who for our sakes died and rose again. Amen.