

Prayer for Enlightenment

O Lord, we pray, speak in this place, in the calming of our minds and in the longing of our hearts, by the words of my lips and in the thoughts that we form. Speak, O Lord, for your servants listen. Amen.

Ten or 15-years ago, before streaming became what it was, many of us would record programs on our DVR so that we could watch them later. I have friends who would often record the evening news so that they could watch it the next morning as they prepared for work.

The problem was that sometimes they would forget that the news was a recording. I remember one time when they went out with umbrellas in preparation for the rainy day, because they forgot they were watching a weather forecast that wasn't current. The DVR forecast was not up to date with the latest weather information. They were making their decisions on outdated information.

The disciples that Jesus is addressing are excellent meteorologists. They didn't have Doppler radar and the latest reports from weather satellites, but they are good at reading the signs of impending rain or hot weather. They know that clouds in the west herald rain and that a south wind brings heat.

Jesus' point is that they are good at predicting the weather with current information.

But...in understanding the times, they are using outdated information...they are watching a recording on their DVR. To be clear, predicting the weather is not a bad thing. Jesus' concern is that their skill at reading the weather indicators, is not matched by their skill at observing and reading the spiritual indicators around them. Jesus calls these spiritual indicators the "signs of the times" (Lk 12:56).

You are making decisions based upon old news.

Note that Jesus is talking to his disciples here. The scripture text is a continuation of the earlier conversation where Jesus is talking to his disciples. Yes, the final verses for today but the majority of what we hear today is addressed to the disciples.

Jesus pulls in disciples aside and talks with them. I think that Jesus sees the potential of great commitment in his disciples...a commitment that He does not see in the crowds. So Jesus says to his disciples.

⁵¹ Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!

⁵² From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three;

⁵³ they will be divided:

father against son
and son against father,
mother against daughter
and daughter against mother,
mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law
and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.(Lk 12)”

In this story, we find a radical kind of commitment that God is asking from his disciples. These disciples were asked to give their total commitment to Jesus Christ in the world. But what does that mean? What does it mean to be totally committed to Jesus Christ, to be radically committed to Jesus Christ in this day and age?

What does that mean today when terrorists commit to a cause and wear bombs and blow themselves up for their cause?

What does total commitment to Jesus Christ mean when terrorists clearly embrace their cause more than their love for their family, friends, and even their own life?

Jesus’ words in Luke 12 are God’s invitation for you and me to be committed to Christ, the church, and the mission of the church.

Not just committed only to Christ.

Not just committed only to the church.

I am convinced that to be a disciple of Christ is to be committed not only to Christ and not only to the church but a disciple is to be also committed to the mission of the church as well.

The mission of the church is to be the love of Christ in all situations of life.

The mission of the church is to share the Good News about what God has done for us and can do for others.

The mission of the church is to work for social justice and social compassion for all people in all places.

Recently, I have been thinking about people who have been obsessed with mission. Scott Carpenter was one of our seven first astronauts. He was one of the first to circle the globe from outer space. Scott Carpenter had a sense of mission.

Scott Carpenter says,

This project of being an astronaut and going to the moon, gives me the possibility of using all of my capabilities and all of my interests and gifts at once. *This is something that I would be willing to give my life for* (italics mine). I think a person is fortunate to have something that you care that much about that you would give your life for. There are risks involved, that’s for sure.

Then Scott Carpenter went on to say in the following in a letter to his wife,

My dear, if this comes to a fatal, screaming fiery end for me, I will have three main regrets. I will have lost the opportunity to prepare for my children’s life here on this planet. I will miss

the pleasure of seeing you and loving you when you are a grandmother. And I will have never learned to play the guitar. Signed, Scott.

He cared for his wife.

He cared for his children.

He wanted to play the guitar.

But more than that, more than his love for his wife and children...

more than his wanting to learn to play the guitar...

Scott Carpenter was willing to give his life for the mission to go to the moon.

What does it mean for us to commit to THE mission of Jesus Christ?

Some 15-years ago, in 2010, 10 aid workers in a remote part of northeast Afghanistan were killed. This team had just trekked 100 miles back through the mountains to provide eye care for some of the poorest and most remote communities in Afghanistan when they were attacked.

Dan Terry, a United Methodist, was among the dead.

“It is almost beyond belief that Dan would be murdered in Afghanistan,” said a friend. “He understood the wisdom of poor communities and always asked, ‘What can I learn from the community that I am with?’”

Dan Terry spent 40 years volunteering with those most in need in Afghanistan. The 64-year-old was fluent in several languages and understood the Afghan culture. He often helped aid groups provide care to remote areas.

Dan Terry and his wife lived in Afghanistan and raised their 3 daughters there.

Dan Terry was committed to the mission of helping the villagers of Afghanistan.

Scott Carpenter was committed to the mission of going to the moon.

What Jesus wanted more than anything else was *not* to have a 120 *half-committed* disciples but Jesus wanted 12 *fully-committed* disciples. Those 12 fully committed disciples would change the world.

One of my favorite quotes comes from Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In his book THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP he writes,

True disciples are always few in number.

Do not put your hopes in large numbers for true disciples will always be few.

Everyone once in a while as a pastor, when I get caught up and want to see *large* crowds on Sunday morning. The crowds imply that I am a “successful pastor.”

I need Dietrich Bonhoeffer to remind me *that Jesus ultimately found power in a small number of transformed lives rather than in the casualness of the crowds.*

The Spanish poet, Oretaga, wrote about the famous French impressionist artist Gauguin. Gauguin was successful early in life. He was famous even as young artist. Often people who achieve great success in their early life lean back and rest on their laurels.

I think that happened to Gauguin. As the years passed by, he became very non-productive in his art. Oretaga, the Spanish poet, says of him, “His creative energies degenerated into hobbies.”

Yes, “his creative energies degenerated into hobbies.” What a terrible thing to say about anyone...that their energies degenerated into hobbies.

Let us not let the creative energy of the Holy Spirit in us deteriorate into a hobby. Christianity is more than just one of our hobbies.

Jesus knew the crowds would always be large in number and the committed disciples would be few. Yet Jesus knew even a small number of transformed and committed lives could and would change the world.

I like the way Eugene Peterson translates this Luke passage.

[Jesus said to his disciples:]

“I’ve come to start a fire on this earth—how I wish it were blazing right now! I’ve come to change everything, turn everything rightside up—how I long for it to be finished! Do you think I came to smooth things over and make everything nice? Not so. I’ve come to disrupt and confront! From now on, when you find five in a house, it will be—

Three against two,
and two against three;
Father against son,
and son against father;
Mother against daughter,
and daughter against mother;
Mother-in-law against bride,
and bride against mother-in-law.”

Then he turned to the crowd: “When you see clouds coming in from the west, you say, ‘Storm’s coming’—and you’re right. And when the wind comes out of the south, you say, ‘This’ll be a hot one’—and you’re right. Frauds! You know how to tell a change in the weather, so don’t tell me you can’t tell a change in the season, the God-season we’re in right now.

You don’t have to be a genius to understand these things. Just use your common sense....”

To make everything rightside up!
I can’t wait!

Thanks be to God.
Amen.