



The Radical Disciple

August 14, 2016

“Our common way of avoiding radical discipleship is to be selective; choosing those areas in which commitment suits us and staying away from those areas in which it will be costly.”

John Stott

Thoughts for the Week

Scriptures - Jeremiah 38: 4-6, 8-10 • Hebrews 12: 1-4 • Luke 12: 40-53

Perhaps this bit of news may not be news for all you who will read this, but just in case you may not have heard, there is a sort of low-key war going on in our country at this moment. This is not a shooting war in the strict sense of course; no one has been killed, no heavy weapons are involved but the two sides are nonetheless seriously at odds with one another.

A political scientist recently described it as a struggle for the soul of America; it is called culture wars. It takes place on several fronts: religion, morality, art, education, the family, law and politics. Here is a simple definition I recently pulled up on Google: “A conflict between two groups with different ideals, beliefs and philosophies. It is a culture war between the secular world and religious activism.”

Now, inasmuch as this war often involves Christians, let me offer several examples: Several years ago Hobby Lobby brought suit to the Supreme Court insisting that it be allowed to opt out of offering some forms of birth control to their employees that are part of the Obama Healthcare Mandate. The owners claimed that

Hobby Lobby is a privately held company and that the law, if passed, would be contrary to their Christian beliefs. Much to the comfort of Hobby Lobby, the Supreme Court ruled in their favor. Nonetheless, the suit opened the door to other Christian institutions: universities, religious communities and others that employ "varying belief" workers. In some instances private businesses such as wedding vendors, entertainers and photographers refused to engage or do business with gay or lesbian individuals. So, the war goes on unabated. The fundamental complaint by these individuals is that their conscience would suffer from such secular intrusions.

Setting aside the culture wars for a moment, let us ask the more fundamental question of suffering that we find outlined so well in the scriptures. The question is this: have you or I ever suffered for our Christian faith? Has any real harm come to us because we believe in Jesus Christ? Oh, of course, I felt I was being made to suffer because, as a youngster, I was compelled to attend Wednesday evening prayer services as well as Sunday evening worship services, but that hardly fits the definition of suffering!

My sense is that American Christians do not suffer very much for their faith, at least not when compared to our Christian brothers and sisters in other countries. A recent Christian columnist wrote as follows: "Today, dire situations are commonplace in many parts of our world: refugees are being refused, immigrants are turned away. The toll of human suffering is overwhelming in places like Syria, Yemen, Chad, Sudan, Egypt, Kenya, Turkey, Ethiopia, Somalia, India, Algeria, Libya, Afghanistan, Greece, France and Belgium to name only a few". In many of these countries Christianity is literally being wiped out.

Here then is a true and realistic picture of a war of cultures: Christian vs. Non Christian. For this reason then, the scriptures for this Sunday can readily remind us that if we wish to be called followers of Jesus Christ we need to be prepared to live with the responsibilities that faith urges us to accept.

The life of the prophet Jeremiah in the first reading, for instance, tells us of a man who was unwilling to relinquish his call from God to defend the sacred Word of God to civil (cultural) or religious authorities. For this he was unceremoniously thrown in to an open pit until some friends rescued him. Nonetheless, for the rest of his prophetic life he was harassed by the cultural representatives of his time.

Finally, we have the extraordinary example of Jesus who was willing to suffer and die for his determination to "bring fire upon the earth." "How I wish it were already blazing," he says.

Perhaps the question at this point then is to ask whether we Christians are willing to engage the culture of our times not as warriors ready to subdue our adversaries but rather to invite them to join us in the common effort to set the world on fire.

Happy Birthday - Patricia (8/17)

One in Christ Moment

If you're like me, the word *radical* could seem a bit scary; it might even make you nervous. When I was growing up, my parents and other adults I knew used the term to describe people or behavior which they considered extreme and, by extension, irresponsible and unreasonable. I remember hearing my father refer to a well-known Fundamentalist preacher as "that old *radical*." On another occasion, in referring to some sort of political protest of which he disapproved, he said something like, "you'd have to be really *radical* to act like that." That is still probably the most common way the term is used... to refer to something that is

extreme, maybe unreasonable, a bit “out there.”

I was still thinking of the word *radical* in those terms the first time I read the phrase “radical discipleship.” I couldn’t imagine that such an expression could refer to anything positive with regard to Christian living. Then I learned that our English word *radical* comes from the Latin word, *radix*, which means “root.” So, to be precise, I should understand the word *radical* to mean “that which relates or pertains to the root” of something.

In other words, to call something *radical* means, at least technically, that it represents the most basic, most essential, most fundamental characteristics or qualities of the subject under consideration. Thus, *radical* discipleship, as I use the term, refers to discipleship (by which I mean “following Christ”) of the most basic, most essential sort. Discipleship that takes the teaching and example of Jesus seriously. Discipleship without any “fine print” that attempts to explain why the principles which Jesus laid down in the Gospels cannot apply to “our day and age.” Discipleship without any excuses.