



BENEDICTINE SISTERS OF CHICAGO

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time
September 7, 2025
Sr. Susan Quaintance

Wis 9: 13-18b
Ps 90: 3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 14-17
Phlm 9-10, 12-17
Lk 14: 25-33

I have an internal hermeneutical shorthand for how each of the gospel writers presents Jesus. Mark's Jesus is stark and direct; Matthew's Jesus is hard-corn and tough; John's Jesus is mystical and otherworldly, and Luke's Jesus is gentle. Gentle as in reaching out to women and the poor, more "Do not be afraid" than all the other gospels combined, etc.

But this Sunday's gospel – in the context of this whole series of late summer gospels of Cycle C – is a good reminder of how shorthand like that can get me into trouble. This Sunday the gospel continues Luke's teachings on discipleship, and they are anything but gentle. Over the past few weeks, we've been told to pick up our cross and carry it – twice. We've been reminded about where our real treasure is, how more will be required of whom more has been entrusted, that Jesus causes division, and last week, about inviting those who can never invite us back. Jesus simply refuses to let his message be reduced to shorthand.

Today's gospel begins, "Great crowds were traveling with them, and he turned and addressed them." In my introverted heart, I have wondered if Jesus wasn't tired of being with crowds of people all the time, so he said something really harsh to get some of them, at least, to go away. Again, probably too reductive. But that line is a good clue. He's talking to everybody, not the Twelve, not the religious professionals, but everybody who claims to want to be a disciple. He makes his expectations really clear. Nobody – not even the people we love most and best – can rank above Jesus on our priorities. No things – not books or clothes or phones or computers or cars – can be so dear to us that we aren't willing to let go of them for the sake of the kingdom. Not even our own lives can be more important to us than doing the will of God. Jesus lays out what it means to be a disciple and asks each of us to really consider whether we are up for it or not.

The liturgy offers us an example in Philemon. When he made his baptismal promises and became a Christian, he said, like all of us, "Yes, I want to be a disciple, no matter what it takes." But we get a glimpse in today's second reading of the rubber hitting the road. Paul teaches Philemon, in a letter that would have been read to the whole house church, that being a disciple means re-ordering relationships and relinquishing the right that legitimately held. Paul doesn't tell Philemon that he must free Onesimus – or at least send him back to Paul – but he certainly nudges him toward that. Nothing would have required Philemon to do that – nothing, that is, except the gospel of Jesus Christ, the demands of which Luke's Jesus is so clear about today.

All of this scares me. It scares me because I have made a pretty public profession of discipleship, and I fail wildly at it much of the time. My hope – as is so often the case – comes from what we prayed together in the Psalm response. A long time ago I learned that verse 12 is the key to Psalm 90: "Teach us to number our days aright that we may gain wisdom of heart." Wisdom comes from God. Perspective comes from God. Mercy comes from God. The grace to do the hard work of discipleship comes from God. It cannot be otherwise, and it is the only thing worth hanging on to.

Teach us to number our days aright that we may gain wisdom of heart.