

Fil-Am Community Church

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Family Camp 5-7 Sept

Key Verse Luke 9:23

“The Pain and Pleasure of Being a True Disciple”

I don't know how you are feeling at this moment. Some may be feeling good because of this wonderful family camp that we're having but some may still be feeling troubled by something. You know, you can be lonely in a crowd. But whatever state you're in and with all the bad news coming from around the world, it is worth reflecting on the death of a very important person, which almost went unnoticed last week. Larry LaPrise, the man who wrote "The Hokey Pokey" died peacefully at the age of 93. According to reports, the most traumatic part for his family was getting him into the coffin. They put his right foot in ...And then the trouble started. (You put your right foot in, you take your right foot out, you put your right foot in, and you shake it all about. You do the hokey pokey and you turn yourself around, that's what it's all about)

Well, I just want to make you laugh a little bit before I talk about something serious in this message. It will encourage you. But it can also make you cringe or uncomfortable. Some of us have been too comfortable that we don't want to get out of our comfort zones anymore. So, this message will comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.

This morning I'd like to talk about the pain and pleasure of being a true disciple of Jesus.

Life is painful. If you don't agree with that you've never lived long enough. Being a Christian is painful, too. If you don't agree with that you've never been a Christian long enough. Or maybe you're not a Christian. I have yet to meet a Christian who said that it was easy being a Christian. It's not easy. In fact, Jesus himself told his disciples that they have to make a lot of sacrifices if they are to be true disciples or followers of him.

In Luke 9:23, we read *“And He was saying to them all, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.”*

Jesus gave two conditions to anyone who would follow him. If you're going to be a follower of Jesus, you must be willing to do these two things. First, deny yourself. Second, take up your cross daily. What do these two things exactly mean?

The Greek word that Jesus used for “deny” means to disregard one's interests. It can also mean to act entirely unlike oneself. In other words, to deny yourself is to put aside all your interests, ambitions, favorites, whims, caprices, and the like. Why is he asking us to do that? It's because they serve as stumbling blocks as we follow Jesus. Jesus wants our full attention, our full commitment to him and not to anything or anyone that will get in the way. We're not truly following Jesus if we haven't gotten rid of those things that distract us from following him.

How about taking up your cross daily? What does it mean? Some people think Jesus was referring to the pain and suffering we experience in life. It's like when you have a difficult husband, the wife says, “He's a cross I have to bear”. That may be so. But Jesus was talking about something far deeper than that. In Jesus' day, a cross wasn't just a symbol of pain and suffering; it was mainly a symbol of death. The Romans executed criminals by crucifying them. So, the disciples knew exactly what Jesus was talking about. What Jesus was telling them

is that they needed to put to death their own plans and desires, and then turn their lives over to Him and do His will every day.

You see, Jesus doesn't simply call us to believe that he existed, or even to believe that he can save us. He calls on us to commit our whole lives to him—to trust him alone for our salvation, and then to follow him as his disciples.

He says in Luke 14:27, "*Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple*".

So, to be a true disciple, you must first disregard anything that would distract you from following Jesus. Then, to prevent that thing which you disregarded from ever rearing its ugly head again, Jesus says, stamp it out, extinguish it, kill it, annihilate it.

Now, of course, this is easier said than done. We all struggle with this. It's not easy to put away a habit, an attitude, a behavior. In fact, it's painful. That's why it's a sacrifice. You sacrifice only the thing which you love dearly. It's not a sacrifice if you give it up so easily. But when you give it up, you must give it up completely. You part with it permanently. Even though it's painful.

This morning, I'd like to talk about a few of the things we need to sacrifice to become a true disciple or follower of Jesus. One of these is

1. You Sacrifice Your Plans

All of us have plans. Any thinking person has a plan. It can be a good plan or a bad plan but the truth is we make plans. After this Service, we plan to eat. And because we're going to eat, I plan to make this message short. Do you plan to say Amen? Some are planning to leave tomorrow and travel thousands of miles from here but we plan to keep on praying so they'll come back.

The thing is, we can make plans but if those plans don't line up with God's plans, then they're no good. You may think it's a good plan but it can turn out to be not for your good. Proverbs 14:12 says, "*There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.*" We can be excited about our plans. We may be thrilled about the prospect of carrying it out. But we must be careful that it is not just all emotions. We have to factor in the leading and will of God.

Years ago, I attended a singles fellowship in a church. The speaker is a missionary and she related to us what she went through before she obeyed God's call and plan for her life. She said that when she was in her 20's she became attracted to a guy in their church. The problem was he wasn't a Christian. Another problem was that she felt being called to the mission field by God. But she had such strong emotions for the guy and although she knew it was wrong she ignored God's calling and prayed for the guy for his salvation. She reasoned that she wouldn't become involved with the guy anyway until he gets saved and reasoned also that it would be better if she had a partner in the mission field. She became friends with the guy. She continued to pray. Then, one Sunday, she saw him raised his hand when the Pastor gave the invitation to receive Christ. To cut the story short, the guy courted her, they became engaged and were married. After a few months, they moved to Texas upon her new husband's prodding. So, they went and she forgot all about her missionary calling. In Texas, they attended a church which her husband had been involved in before. It was a fine church but as years passed she was discovering something strange about the church. Later on, she found out it was a pseudo-Christian cult. She persuaded her husband to leave but he wouldn't and threatened her if she did. Realizing that her husband was becoming violent, she escaped with their two children.

She went back to her former church. And she repented. God was gracious because he restored her life's calling. She then became a missionary and followed God's plans for her.

God says in Jeremiah 29:11, *"For I know the plans that I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope."*

We don't know the future. Only God does. Trust in him. Give up your plans in favor of God's plans.

So, you sacrifice your plans. Then, you also

2. Sacrifice Your Money

There is nothing wrong with money. And money is a necessity in this world. But God may ask you to give up your money for him. I know many of us don't have that much money but God may even ask you to give up whatever you may have.

Anyway, the current president of World Vision USA, Richard Stearns, was the CEO of a big company that manufactures fine china. He started with that company, Lenox Inc., in 1995, after serving as CEO of Parker Brothers. He thought that it was where God wanted him to be for the rest of his life and it was a dream come true for him because his salary and the perks that came with his position was more than enough to give his family a comfortable and luxurious life even after his retirement.

In a series of events, however, Richard came to the realization that God wanted him to head the world's leading charity organization. That wasn't in his plans because he didn't have the desire. All he wanted was to provide well for his

family. Their children attended private school. They have a 10-bedroom farmhouse, he had a Jaguar provided by the company, and he knew that he could retire in less than a decade because of what he was making. But God's leading was so strong that he had to give them all up after only two and a half years with Lenox and move to California, take a meager salary, and go around the world raising money and awareness about the plight of poor children.

Richard gave up his money, his treasure in order to put them where they have eternal value. He responded to Jesus' command, "*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.*" (Matthew 6:19-20 NIV)

You sacrifice your plans, your money, and also

3. You Sacrifice Your Relationships

One of the most painful things that could happen to you as a Christian is when people leave you, reject you, or disown you because you're a Christian or have become one. In Muslim families, this is more pronounced because the parents would ask their child who has become a Christian to leave home and even hurt them. There are even reported cases of children being put to death. Muslim parents feel that it is a big disgrace to their family when a child becomes a Christian.

In the church I attended in Australia, one of our missionaries confessed that his parents wouldn't talk to him since he became a Christian and so he would stay at a friend's house every time he came home to Sydney for his furlough or vacation.

You will feel rejected when you're a Christian. People will mock you because of your faith. In school, you're not supposed to say a prayer or even say "Bless you" to someone who sneezes. Friends will walk away. They won't want to hang around with you anymore because they will find that you are living a different lifestyle which is radically different from theirs.

Greg Laurie, an evangelist and pastor of Harvest Fellowship in California, said that when he became a Christian in his teens, he didn't want his close friends to know about it because he was afraid they'd turn him away. One day, a friend invited him to have some fun in his friend's house together with others. So he went but as he approached the house, he realized that he was carrying a Bible. He hid the Bible in a bush in front of the house and just like that entered the house and started to have some fun with his buddies.

Suddenly, the door opened and his friend's mother appeared with a Bible in her hand. "Whose Bible is this?" she asked. "I saw this under the bush while I was cutting it." Of course, Greg admitted it was his. He was so embarrassed and since then he resolved not to be afraid of losing friends.

Jesus says that friends and loved ones will leave us and we will be persecuted when we follow him. In Matthew 5:11, he says, "*Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.*"

It comes with the territory, as the saying goes. You can expect it to happen if it hasn't happened to you yet. You must have heard of these horrible reports that say that Islamic militants of the organization called ISIS are on a rampage in Iraq and are harassing and persecuting Christians and killing those who wouldn't renounce their faith. Imagine if you were there. How would you react? What would you have done?

Jesus tells us to give up our rights to ourselves. Give up our relationships if we are to follow him. It is a hard requirement but Jesus asks for nothing less. Our love for him must be more than our love for anyone on earth, even for our own selves. And you know why? Because he loved you more than you could love him. He first loved you when he died for you on the cross. That's the greatest sacrifice anyone could ever do. Jesus gave up his own life for you and me. He didn't want us to spend eternity in hell and be far away from God. He came to earth so he can go through the humiliation of dying on the cross to take away our sins. We don't deserve salvation, we don't deserve to be set free from sin and death because we are stubborn and rebellious. We want to do things on our own. But God was patient with us and he loves us so much. The Bible says, "*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*" (John 3:16)

What should our response then to this love? To heed his call to follow him 24/7. Not 24 only, not 7, 24/7. And it means dying to ourselves daily. That besetting sin, put it to death. That unwholesome habit, put it to death. That irresistible vice, put it to death. That critical spirit, put it to death. That disobedient heart, put it to death. And give yourself wholly to Jesus.

As I said, this message can make you feel uncomfortable. But Jesus didn't call us to live comfortable lives. He wants us to identify with his life and suffering. Because the Christian life is not about conforming to this world, as Pastor Dave mentioned last night, but conforming to the image of Jesus. The Christian life is not about doing things in the dark like non-Christians do but being lights in this dark world.

But I said as well that this message will encourage you. Because let me say that the Christian life is not just about pain and sacrifice, but also about pleasure and satisfaction. In fact, Jesus says that his followers will experience abundant life

in this world. In John 10:10, he promised his disciples, *“I came that they may have life and have it to the... full”*. Not half-full, not $\frac{3}{4}$ full, not almost full, but full and that’s totally full. And when you are full, how do you feel? You feel satisfied. That is what Jesus will give you. A life that is full of satisfaction. For example, he gives you

1. The satisfaction of Forgiveness

If not for his forgiveness, we are still wallowing in our sins. We are still doing things that can destroy us. And we are still filled with guilt and remorse. I read the story of Charles Colson who told of watching Albert Speer being interviewed on “Good Morning, America” some years back. Speer was the Hitler confidant whose technological genius kept the Nazi factories running throughout World War II.

Speer was the only one of the twenty-four war criminals tried at Nuremberg to admit his guilt, and he had served twenty years in a Spandau prison.

He asked Speer: “You have said the guilt can never be forgiven or shouldn’t be. Do you still feel that way?”

Colson said he will never forget the look on Speer’s face as he responded, “I served a sentence of twenty years, and I could say, ‘I’m a free man, my conscience has been cleared by serving the whole time as punishment.’ But I can’t get rid of it. This new book is part of my atoning, of clearing my conscience.” The interviewer pressed the point: “You really don’t think you’ll be able to clear it totally?” Speer shook his head. “I don’t think it will be possible.”

Colson said: “For thirty-five years Speer had accepted complete responsibility for his crime. His writings were filled with contrition and warnings

to others to avoid his moral sin. He desperately sought expiation. All to no avail. I wanted to write Speer, to tell him about Jesus and his death on the cross, about God's forgiveness. But there wasn't time. The ABC interview was his last public statement; he died shortly after."

If only Speer knew that there complete forgiveness of sins through Jesus. Psalm 103:12 says, *"As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us."*

So, the Christian life can be a pleasure because of the satisfaction of forgiveness. Then, there's also

2. The Satisfaction of Knowing You're Not Alone

As I said earlier, one of the things that can happen when you become a Christian is that your friends will leave you. But even if your friends and your family leave you, let me encourage that you're not alone. You're not alone because you gain new friends and brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers in the Lord.

Jesus says in Matthew 19:29, *"All who have given up home or brothers and sisters or father and mother or children or land for me will be given a hundred times as much."*

That's the bonus of becoming a Christian. You have an instant extended family. And you can find this extended family anywhere you are on the planet.

In 1992 when I moved from California to NJ because of work, a Christian couple who I met in a Bible study adopted me. They allowed me to use one of their bedrooms for free and really treated me as family. When my late grandma came to join me a few months later, they accomodated my grandma too. They always

checked my grandma and made sure that her needs were met. And when my parents came to join us, well, that's when we moved to an apartment.

So you see, that's one of the perks of being a Christian, you readily and immediately find help when you need it.

There are so many other pleasures that the Christian life can give you and our time is not enough for me to give them to you one by one. But the best I believe is this. When you become a Christian, the best pleasure is the

3. Satisfaction of Being With Jesus for Eternity

Forget all about the other satisfactions. Being with Jesus in heaven is worth it all. Remember the thief on the cross? All he said before he died was, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!" And Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."

The thief didn't get a chance to experience God's provisions in his life. He didn't get a chance to meet other Christians. But he got the chance to be with Jesus for all eternity. That surpassed all other chances he could ever have on earth.

Jesus promised eternal life to his followers in John 6:47 (MSG), *"I'm telling you the most solemn and sober truth now: Whoever believes in me has real life, eternal life."*

That is really sobering and reassuring. It is the greatest satisfaction in life. Paul says in Philippians 3:13-14 *"Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."*

And this is what kept him going. Even though he was hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted, struck down. He knew that one day the life of Jesus will be revealed in his mortal body. In short, he was expecting to be in heaven when he died.

If you're not a Christian, you too can have eternal life. It's not complicated. It's a no-brainer. What do you need to do? Just come as you are to Jesus. With no pretensions. With all your warts and pimples, to speak. Because he cares for you and he loves you. He will forgive you of your sins. He is ready to embrace you in his arms and say, "My dear child, I want you to spend eternity with me." Do not think that your religion will earn you a merit badge. Do not think that your philosophy will garner you points. Do not think that your good works will give you an advantage.

Just believe that Jesus died for your sins. Believe that he alone can save you and no one else. Jesus says in John 14:6 (NIV), "*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*"

Today people are so concerned about their survival. There is talk about recession, depression, inflation, deflation. People are nervous. They are getting insecure. The world could plunge into great economic turmoil and who knows what's going to happen next?

The Christian, however, knows that in the midst of all these troubles, he or she can rest assured that God is in control.