

Suttons Bay Congregational Church  
 Luke 14:25-33

September 9, 2007  
 Rev. Robin Long

25 Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: 26 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. 27 And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

28 "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? 29 For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, 30 saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'

31 "Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? 32 If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. 33 In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.

It's keeping me up at night. It fills my mind all day. It's consuming me. I think it's time that I fessed' up. I suffer from ebayitis. Though I try to ignore the impact that ebayitis is having on my life, it's difficult. I admit that along with keeping me up into the wee hours of the morning and forcing me to wake before the sun, my ebayitis is also interfering with my work. I'll be sailing through a day in the office, taking care of correspondence or studying for a sermon when suddenly, I'm overtaken by ebayitis and I have to log on to the internet. For you see ebayitis is an addiction to EBay. I can't stop using EBay—the online auction service. EBay is a great thing—you can buy and sell everything from the finest jewelry to rustiest car parts, all from the comfort of your home computer. I've got my account set up so that all I have to do is hit a button and my bill is paid. Now not all EBay use is bad and not all EBay users suffer from ebayitis. But I am not one of those people. Because of my natural tendencies towards compulsion, I can't stop checking my EBay summary sheet. I have to know if I'm the high bidder, if I've won the auction, how much an item I got outbid on finally sold for, and I can't wait to see how the sellers from whom I'm buying evaluate me as a buyer. And what am I bidding on? A life-saving medication? A lovely gift for my mother's birthday? An out-of-print theological manifesto? No. I'm searching for fabrics with Grandma Moses paintings imprinted on them. To tell you the truth, I didn't even know that there was such a thing as fabric with Grandma Moses paintings imprinted on it until three weeks ago. But suddenly, after discovering it on EBay, I have to have it. It's ridiculous. Something that I didn't even know about a month ago has suddenly seemingly taken over my life. And why? Because I'm afraid. I know that there were only so many yards of barkcloth with Grandma Moses paintings printed on them made and they're in limited supply and so I want all of them I can get before it's too late--even though I have no idea what I'm going to do with the pieces I've already bought.

But is that really the reason I've developed this case of ebayitis, a fear that I won't be able to get this lovely fabric? I don't think so. It likely has to do with a deeper fear that has been rearing it's ugly head in my life of late. As many of you know, Corey and I moved to Northern Michigan three and a half years ago to start a church for the United Church of Christ. Our ministry, and now Corey's ministry there, has been funded by a grant from the Michigan Conference of the United Church of Christ. That grant runs out at the end of this year. Because The Potter's House has only been meeting for a couple of years, it is not yet in the financial position to be a self-supporting church. We've applied for another grant from the conference, but we won't know about that until mid-October. And so, until then, I'm left with an incredible sense of dis-ease, wondering what will happen. And how do I deal with this

disease—Ebay. At least when I'm on EBay I have a sense of control—I can gauge my progress—I can make seemingly important decisions. My ebayitis protects me from dealing with the real issues of concern in my life.

Now I hope that none of you are suffering from ebayitis, but I'm guessing that plenty of you are suffering from other dis-eases that distract you from dealing with the real issues in your lives. Alcohol, food, clothes, knick knacks, cars, homes—you name it and it can be a great temporary distraction from what ails you. And yet once you've had the drink, eaten the meal, cut the tags off the clothes, dusted the knick knacks, driven the car, and decorated the home, you find yourself in the same boat of dis-ease, restlessness, and searching that you were in before. No matter what you're able to buy, you can't seem to possess that for which you're really seeking. Surely there is no amount of Grandma Moses imprinted barkcloth that can give me the peace of mind I'm so desperate for at this time of upheaval in Corey's professional life. (At this point I'd like to make an aside—we are not looking for jobs outside the area. Corey has said that if he has to flip burgers for us to stay here, he'll flip burgers. This is our home, you are our family, and moving isn't an option. So, please stop saying "Please don't leave us" as you leave worship on Sundays. There's no need to be anxious. You're stuck with me for the long haul. Enough said. Back to the sermon.)

So no, no amount of Grandma Moses imprinted barkcloth can solve my problems and no car, home, or fine collectible can solve yours. And this, my friends, is Jesus' point this morning. The last words of this scripture are "any of you who does not give up everything you have cannot be my disciple." Now we abhor the thought that we have to give up our possessions in order to be disciples of Christ. But quite frankly, I don't think that's all Jesus is asking us to give up. Compared to what we really have to give up in order to follow Christ, giving up our stuff is easy.

What Jesus is talking about here is idolatry—Jesus is asking us to really think about what are we worshipping, obeying, following, and pledging our allegiance to. And that is the question I ask of all of us this morning. What are you worshipping, obeying, following, and pledging your allegiance to? Your bank account? Your job? Your boss? Your lifestyle? Or more to the point—your fear, your shame, your sense of inadequacy, your addiction, your guilt, your need for control? I'd like to think that when push came to shove, most of us would be willing to give up our physical possessions for God's sake. But what we really need to give up in order to be free to follow Christ is our underlying personal traits and characteristics that inhibit us from giving ourselves over to God.

Discipleship is expensive, it's consuming. It's not just a Sunday morning thing. Jesus asks us to think about our discipleship as a builder thinks about a building project. A responsible builder wouldn't just jump into a project without first assessing the costs, arranging for the workers, and securing the loans necessary to finish the work. Jesus explains that the same is true of a military general. A good general wouldn't send troops into battle without first understanding the nature and resources of the enemy, without first studying a map to make sure the troops are situated for victory (think Cornwallis's mistakes at Yorktown), and without knowing that there was a good chance for success. It's not unlike our football motif going on this morning. What coach would lead a team onto the field without first having his players study the game tapes, the opposing team's statistics, and then developing plays to respond to them. (Well, those of you sporting anything but maize and blue might have an idea of what coach would do that after last weekend but we're not going to talk about that right now . . .) The point is that Christian Discipleship isn't something to be entered into lightly—it's consuming, it's life-altering, and

Jesus requires that he be the A-Number-One priority in our lives, not an after thought or something we do on occasion to give ourselves a warm and fuzzy feeling.

So how do we do that? How do we make Jesus our A-Number-One priority when there are so many other things competing for our attention and our resources? The answer is in this scripture—we have to plan for it. Now that sounds very odd to me. I've always thought of being a disciple as something I am, not something I do. I don't normally plan for something I am—it just kind of happens. When I met Corey I didn't plan on being his wife, it just sort of happened. I didn't plan on being a mother, it just sort of happened. I didn't move here planning to be your minister, it just sort of happened, and for that I thank God. But apparently discipleship requires a whole lot more than just being in the right place at the right time. If we think of discipleship as something we do, it takes on a whole new meaning. And begs us to ask the question of ourselves, what's my plan for following Christ? How am I preparing myself for discipleship? Am I praying? Do I read the Bible? Am I coming to church? Am I doing good for other's for Christ's sake? Am I surrounding myself with folks who support me in my discipleship? Am I intentional about following Jesus or do I just claim a faith in him when it suits my needs? These are tough questions, and yet these are the questions we have to ask ourselves if we're ever going to be able to follow scripture and be willing to give up our pride, our control, our fear, our anger and our stuff in order to be free to follow Jesus.

Now I don't know what your plan for discipleship is, but I'm guessing it starts with givin' it up, with relinquishment, with abandoning what's holding you back from giving your whole heart and soul to God. "Abandonment is not just hanging loose. It is letting go. It is a severing of the strings by which one manipulates, controls, administrates the forces of one's life. Abandonment is receiving things the way one receives a gift with open hands and opened heart. Abandonment to God is the climactic point in one's life." And that's what I pray for us all, the courage to abandon the things of this life so that we might fully abandon ourselves to God.