

“All In”

Shared sermon with Rev. Joel Strom and Rev. Rob Carter

9/8/19 - Homecoming Sunday

Jeremiah 18: 1-11

Luke 14: 25-33

“All In”

Egads, those are some strong words! “Whoever comes to me and doesn’t hate their parents, spouse, kids... even life itself, cannot be my disciples... whoever does not give up all their possessions cannot be my disciples?”

After hearing Jesus say that here in Luke, Joel, let me ask you, “Do you really want to be a disciple?”

Let me be honest... I’m not about to hate my family. I have no interest in hating life itself. And while I think there’s a whole lot to be found in living humbly and generously so that others can simply or live... I’m not going to give away my last penny, either.

Do you think Jesus really means this? To give up everything we’ve ever owned. To end all our old relationships?

No... not in the literal sense . Remember, Jesus is a man of radical love and inclusion. He doesn’t want us hating anybody.

Rather, at this point in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus had begun to attract large crowds of folks who’d seen or heard about the amazing miracles he performed. And they wanted some of this miracle man for themselves. So they began following him... travelling with him and his disciples from town to town.

But Jesus needed them to understand... they couldn’t just start following him and say, “That’s that. I’m your disciple now.” Faith is far from that simple. And discipleship is far from that easy.

So here in Luke, Jesus clarified with the crowds that discipleship isn’t something you enter on an impulse. Nor is it something you can just half-ask-me-what and I’ll tell you, right?

Rather, faith is a journey. Discipleship is a process... a process that begins with the an intentional decision. For according to Jesus, you simply can’t say you want to grow closer to God, and closer to who God is calling you to be. It often requires significant, even severe commitment.

So he tells them, “Folks, discipleship isn’t for the faint of heart. Don’t follow me unless you’re willing to all in.”

All in to the journey of faith.

All in to investing in the process of discipleship.

“So if you want to become my disciple,” Jesus says, “you first have to commit to life not as the world would show you, but as I show you. If you want to become my disciple, you must first commit not to the world’s values, but to my values. If you want to become my disciple, you must first commit to letting me shape you... form you... use you for my kingdom.”

That's what Jesus is talking about here in Luke. Reorientation. Transformation. It's the process of becoming more of who God knows you really are... as you grow closer to God and closer to others. Which is... as far as I can tell... the very essence of discipleship.

The very essence of who we say we are here, TPC... as our mission statement declares that we are an inclusive, curious, compassionate, courageous community of faith growing disciples of Christ.

And yet... just as Jesus makes clear in Luke, so it's worth reiterating... this decision to become a disciple of Jesus is not one anyone can make for you. You... and only you... can decide if you are willing to invest in your journey of faith... in your process of discipleship.

The Church, meanwhile, is here to be a resource for those who do. While we can't make anyone become a disciple if they don't want to, we can and we must offer ministries, programs, and community by which people can invest... both in their own faith formation and in the well-being of others.

While Towson Presbyterian Church has long taken the formation of disciples to heart, on this day—this Homecoming Celebration—we begin a brand-new programmatic year of formational ministries waiting your investment. Many ministries are returning with loads of opportunity for each and all—mission and outreach, music ministries, children's church, many more.

But Joel and I also want to talk about some new or evolving ministries that need your investment. We want to let you know not only what they are—or what changes are occurring with them—but why we believe they're important... and worthy of your investment.

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And we begin with Adult Spiritual Formation, and the program that I believe sits at the heart of it all... Small Groups. Now... while I hope you all received a small group brochure this morning, if not, no worries... we'll get you the info. Small Groups come in all shapes and varieties here at TPC. We have fun and fellowship groups, study groups, and also mission and outreach group. Joel... what's coming up for the fall?

Ministry #1 – Adult Spiritual Formation

- **Small Groups**
 - Running, Hiking, Bike Riding, Wine Tasting, MNF, Gentle Yoga for older adults,
 - A group for singles to meet occasionally at a restaurant
 - Together We Serve (learn about and serve with organizations in our community),
 - A follow up to our Waking Up White study using some of our author Debby Irving's resources
- **Also included in your brochure...**
 - "Mary, Martha and Me" - a group for older, single women to talk, eat and share activities
 - Circle 13 for women, Prayer Shawl, and Men's Breakfast....so many opportunities for you to build community within TPC and explore faith.
- Sign up in TH or online at towsonpres.org

- **We Make the Road By Walking**
 - a. We also have...4-week Small Groups for our Church-wide study of Brian McLaren's fantastic book, We Make the Road By Walking.
 - b. Opening words to the book - "*You are not finished yet. You are in the making. You have the capacity to learn, mature, think, change and grow.*"
 - c. I love McLaren > huge for my own faith formation and Rob's too > but he had me at...*you are not finished yet.*
 - The invitation to us is for our Faith to always be forming/growing/evolving
 - d. The title, We Make the Road By Walking, says that...
Faith was never supposed to be a destination, but instead a road, or path, or a way out of old patterns into new patterns.
 - e. For our faith – relationship with God – to be a *living* faith, it has to always be *unfinished*.
 - f. EXCITED about this book. So here's what we're going to do:
 - 1) Read it for the next year – *Yes, I said for the next year* - 52 chapters, one chapter a week – but 3-4 pages per chapter.
 - 2) Each chapter begins with 3 scripture readings – you can read each chapter without the scripture, but our ASF Committee discovered chapters are so much better with the Scripture > Brian reflects on the Scriptures in each chapter.
 - 3) If you know already know a lot of the biblical stories this book is a great opportunity to explore them further.
If you don't have much experience with the Bible, this a GREAT opportunity for you to begin learning them. We encourage you to read the Scriptures and then the chapter.
 - 4) Chapters organized around the seasons of the church – Advent, Epiphany, Lent, Easter...when we get to Advent the book will be exploring Advent.
 - 5) And so...If you have been on this path of learning and growing your faith for a long time...***this book is for you.*** It will only deepen it.And If you're brand new to faith and not really sure where to get started, ***this book is for you.***
 - 6) This is a CHURCH-WIDE STUDY – which means it's for everyone!
 - g. We have 4-week Small Groups this fall to get us grounded and familiar with this book ...more Small Groups to come in Lent
 - h. We'll occasionally work the book into worship and sermons
 - i. Rob and I will offer a monthly Podcast –
 - take a chapter or two and discuss AND be a little transparent and share with you our own experiences of Faith Formation
 - Our youth will explore this as well on Sunday nights
 - j. Finally, author Brian McLaren will be with us here in October HERE in our sanctuary > well, not literally here > we'll Skype with him > He'll tell us about the book and how it might form us this year > we'll have him back again in Lent!

- 7) And so HOW GREAT would it be if **we all** participated in this book study in some way? It would be amazing! It would truly be a CHURCH-WIDE study! Connect to it in some way.
 - a. BEST WAY to experience this study – buy a book downstairs *at the discounted price of \$5.00*, read the scriptures with each chapter and *watch your faith grow and form and evolve in new ways this year!*

Men's Group – Rob

- I guess I need to read that book, huh?
- No... seriously, we're so excited for this book study, if you couldn't tell! And I'm also excited for a new group at which we'll read a chapter of Brian's book each month—a group Joel didn't mention. He and I are forming a brand-new Men's Group! We'll meet on the first Monday of each month beginning in October. We'll have soda, beer, water... we'll talk about a chapter from Brian's book and ask our guy questions and share our guy struggles and, frankly, begin to open ourselves up to spiritual formation in a new way. For the truth is, men and spiritual formation sometimes struggle to go together. Sometimes we men don't know how to approach it or feel as if we don't need it. But in our men's group... we'll prove those illusions false as we form new relationships, have good laughs amid good company and grow along the path of discipleship together.

Ministry #2 – Family & Children's Ministry

- **Children In Worship**

- a. But the Men's Group isn't the only new specific group of formation we're excited about. For a while now, Joel, Jenness and I have been exploring the faith formation of children and youth... and we've become convinced of the **important role worship plays in the faith formation of our children**. Now, at TPC, our church school schedule prohibits children's inclusion in all of worship. And we need to do something about that. We need to teach children not only *how to* worship... but also *how to find meaning, joy, and value* in worship. It's not fair to simply wait until they get into Jr. or Sr. High and then suddenly expect them to find meaning in worship when they haven't worshipped throughout our whole services before.
- b. So... last year, we made the switch to including our Jr. High in all of worship. And this year, we take the additional step of including **5th graders in all of worship on Communion Sundays**. This will enable our 5th graders to worship throughout our entire service once a month, share the sacrament.
- c. But that's not all. On communion Sundays, instead of traditional church school, our **3rd-4th grade classes** will celebrate a specially designed "**Children's Church**" just for them. There, they'll not only learn how about worship in developmentally appropriate ways, but they'll also get to experience the joy and wonder to be found in worshipping together.

- **Parents as Faith Formers**

- a. We're excited for that. But I have to share, those changes are not the most significant thing that will impact your children's faith formation, parents. In fact, the more Joel, Jenness and I have studied this, the more convinced we are that... as much as we love church school and worship, *the* most important faith former in your children's lives is... *you!* That's right. Parent's are a child's #1 faith former... which means having faith conversations with your children... practicing your faith with them... letting them see you live out your faith in front of them... all of these are incredibly important to helping raise your children in the faith.
 - b. But we know this can be challenging and even uncomfortable. So we want to make sure we, as a church, are investing in you, parents, as you invest in your children
- **Parent Small Group**
 - a. So we have formed a We Make the Road By Walking Small Group specifically for parents with young families – it only meets twice, and it will meet at TPC and will dinner AND childcare.
 - b. An opportunity for you to build community with other parents and explore a couple chapters Brian McLaren's book w/ other parents
 - **Parents Night Out**
 - a. But you also need opportunities outside of study to be with one another, build relationships and have some fun
 - b. And so three times a year we offer Parents Night Out – it's an opportunity for parents of children, teens and college students to meet at one of our homes for food, beverages and conversation

Ministry #3 – Faith @ Home Resources

- We've been talking about Faith Formation – worship, Small Groups – they all play a huge role in the formation of our faith. But Faith Formation doesn't just happen here at church or alongside our community of faith. It also happens ON OUR OWN.
- IF YOU WANT YOUR FAITH TO GROW, IT NEEDS TO HAPPEN **OUTSIDE** OF TPC
- At towsonpres.org under the Faith @ Home section of our website, we are slowly building resources for you to grow your faith ON YOUR OWN.
- You'll find:
 - a. Books that Rob and I recommend...
 - b. Podcasts and apps that we recommend...
 - c. Playlists – these very short faith forming experiences
 - d. Some Spiritual Practices – do you ever ask the question *how do I pray* or *what does it look like to connect with God?* START RIGHT HERE with a couple spiritual practices that we recommend.

Ministry #4 – Evangelism & Communication

- We also recognize that discipleship isn't just about us, right? I mean, make no mistake, Joel and I are asking you to invest in your faith formation. But here's where we also ask you to *invest in the faith formation of others*.
- Recently, TPC formed a new team called CORE—**community outreach and engagement**. Their call is to help us grow our relationships beyond our doors. So they are investing in not only making sure the community around us know they are *welcome* here, just as they are... but we want them to know they're *invited*.
- And there's a difference there, isn't there? There's a difference between being welcome to show up some place... and being sincerely, warmly invited and wanted someplace.
- As such, we will begin to have new CORE or Outreach Ministers wearing blue nametags stationed at newly developed or renovated Welcome Centers
 - a. Outside the rear of the sanctuary and in Thompson Hall
- These Outreach ministers will also be available to intentionally welcome and embrace visitors or guests who are with us, and want an intentional welcome and exploration of the church and our ministries.
- But more than that, if we are to be an invitational church... *we all have to get in on the act of inviting and welcoming!*
- So please... keep a lookout for ways you can help communicate who TPC to those around you. Share us on social media. Keep a lookout for new printed material in the pews. And more. CORE and our communications team have lots of good stuff up their sleeves to help us communicate who we are, what we value and that all are genuinely invited here to explore faith and discipleship for themselves.

Wrap-up—Joel

Wow... Well that was a lot, wasn't it? As our sermon comes to a close, let me say this: Ultimately, we hope this was *more* than *less*. We hope we have left you with the feeling that there is *more* for you here at TPC and *more* awaiting you as you walk along the Jesus path. As Rob said at the very beginning, the path or road we are on is one where we commit to allowing God to *slowly* and *patiently* shape us and form us... so God can ultimately *use us* for God's kingdom.

In the introduction to We Make the Road By Walking, Brian says,

What we all want is pretty simply, really. We want to be alive. To feel alive. Not just to exist, but to thrive, to live out loud, to walk tall, breathe free. We want to be less lonely, less exhausted, less conflicted or afraid... more awake, more grateful, more energized and purposeful.

The quest for aliveness is the best thing about religion, I think. It's what we're hoping for when we pray. It's why we gather, celebrate, eat, abstain, attend, practice, sing and contemplate. When people say, 'I'm spiritual,' what they mean, I think, is simple. They're saying, I'm seeking aliveness."

We are not finished yet. We are in the making. Thanks be to God. Amen.