

“Carry the Cross?”

I found the following story on the internet, which identified it as “Traditional”. I’m uncomfortable with some of the dialogue but I hope it will help provide each of us some insight. It starts, **“A little boy about 10 years old was standing before a shoe store on the roadway, barefooted, peering through the window, and shivering with cold.”**

“A lady approached the boy and said, ‘My little fellow, why are you looking so earnestly in that window?’ ‘I was asking God to give me a pair of shoes,’ was the boy’s reply. The lady took him by the hand and went into the store and asked the clerk to get half a dozen pairs of socks for the boy. She then asked if he could give her a basin of water and a towel. He quickly brought them to her. She took the little guy to the back part of the store and removing her gloves, knelt down, washed his little feet, and dried them with a towel. By this time the clerk returned with the socks. Placing a pair upon the boy’s feet, she purchased him a pair of shoes. She tied up the remaining pairs of socks and gave them to him. She patted him

on the head and said, ‘No doubt, my little fellow, you feel more comfortable now?’ As she turned to go, the astonished lad caught her by the hand, and looking up in her face, said, ‘Are you God’s wife?’” Let’s take a moment to think about the boy’s response to the woman’s act of agape – self-giving and sacrificial love. Has someone been or will anyone be so impacted by your agape love – your following of Jesus’ example so that the person you helped asked if you are or the person will declare you belong to God and Jesus? Are you a Sister or Brother of God’s Son, Jesus the Christ?

In verse 27, Jesus explained, “*Those who do not carry their own cross and come after me cannot be my disciples.*” Carrying our Cross is a reference to following Jesus and his example of manifesting God’s Agape – Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love, especially through his death on the Cross. The woman in the Traditional story followed Jesus and his example of living agape love. As the sermon title, “Carry the Cross?”,

suggests, we are called to have an intentional commitment to Jesus and God.

Our Savior indicated something of the extent of the commitment he calls us to fulfill in verses 25-26, *“Once when large crowds of people were going along with Jesus, he turned and said to them, ‘Those who come to me cannot be my disciples unless they love me more than they love father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and themselves as well.’”* Now, those words about the commitment we are required to fulfill as Christians may come across as overly demanding, however, the literal Greek words in the Scripture require us to “hate” all of our other relationships in comparison to our loving commitment to God’s Son and our Messiah – the Christ. Such a requirement is easily rejected because it is too extreme. At least, that is what we are tempted to give as our response. Yet, the real issue for us is whether or not we will put our relationship with Jesus and our Divine Parent above all of our relationships – not in place of them – but as the basis for all of our

relationships and our total life reaching their highest potential! **Martin Luther might be seen as summing this up with his quote, “A religion that gives nothing, costs nothing, and suffers nothing, is worth nothing.”**

Jesus went on to point out the importance of intentionally accepting the costs, which go along with following his way of agape love, as he introduced the issue of evaluating the cost of discipleship **in verse 28, “If one of you is planning to build a tower, you sit down first and figure out what it will cost, to see if you have enough money to finish the job.”** In the verses, which followed, he gave a couple of different examples of how doing such an examination of the costs of intentionally acting were very smart and appropriate.

Rev. Dr. Janet H. Hunt noted, “We do it all the time, of course, perhaps sometimes with a higher level of consciousness than others.” Hunt continued, “We estimate the cost, weighing one option against another, trying to decide if we have enough or want it enough or need it enough.

We do it with our budgets and we do it in our relationships and we do it with our lives.” (“Estimating the Cost” by Rev. Dr. Janet H. Hunt on <words.dancingwiththeword.com>)

James W. Moore shares, “Several centuries ago in a mountain village in Europe, a wealthy nobleman wondered what legacy he should leave to his townspeople. He made a good decision. He decided to build them a church. No one was permitted to see the plans or the inside of the church until it was finished. At its grand opening, the people gathered and marveled at the beauty of the new church. Everything had been thought of and included. It was a masterpiece.”

Moore continues, “But then someone said, ‘Wait a minute! Where are the lamps? It is really quite dark in here. How will the church be lighted?’ The nobleman pointed to some brackets in the walls, and then he gave each family a lamp, which they were to bring with them each time they came to worship.”

“‘Each time you are here’ the nobleman said, ‘the place where you are seated will be lighted.’” **“Each time you are not here, that place will be dark. This is to remind you that whenever you fail to come to church, some part of God’s house will be dark.”**

Moore asks, “That’s a poignant story, isn’t it? And it makes a very significant point about the importance of our commitment ...”

Moore concludes, asking, “What if every member of your church supported the church just as you do? What kind of church would you have? What if every single member served the church, attended the church, loved the church, shared the church, and gave to the church exactly as you do? What kind of church would you be?” (James W. Moore, *Some Things Are Too Good Not To Be True*, Dimensions: Nashville, 1994. pp. 117-118.)

Perhaps picking up on Moore’s point, today’s Gospel Lectionary Reading reports in verse 33, “*In the same way, concluded Jesus,*

‘none of you can be my disciple unless you give up everything you have.’” This brings us back to Jesus’ call for us to “Carry the Cross”. Carrying the Cross does not mean we must go out and be murdered for Christ. Instead, Carrying the Cross means we go out living – living the New Life in Christ – following Jesus and his example of manifesting agape – self-giving and sacrificial love! Many members of Round Grove United Church, United Church of Christ, are doing that this month by being a Walker and/or donating to our CROP Hunger Walk program, and/or taking the time to help set up and/or greet folks at our Western Days booth in the Old Town area of Lewisville or by visiting and taking Water Bottles to the local Fire Station. As the woman in the Traditional story cleaned the boy’s feet and bought him socks and shoes, let our service – our expressions of agape love show our relationship with God and Jesus is of utmost importance to us. As the families in the community were given lamps to bring with them to Worship, so that their presence might add light, so let our frequent participation and ways of service during our Worship Celebrations demonstrate greater light to one

another and especially to our guests! Many of us donated toward our electronic digital sign, so everyone passing by it would have the opportunity to know more about us and God's Radical and Extravagant Hospitality. **As we begin the new school year, these next few months are a good time for each of us to use our opportunities to invite and share the news of our Welcome and Agape Love to family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and acquaintances.** Our personal invitations have a dramatic impact on the lives of persons in need of God's Radical and Extravagant Hospitality and Agape Love. Some of us can do that in person or by telephone or email or twitter or other forms of social media. Carrying the Cross includes sharing the Good News of God's Agape Love and Invitation! Will each of us Carry the Cross? Will you and I seriously consider the cost and intentionally decide to commit ourselves to following Jesus and his agape loving example? **May God empower us and lead us, as we are committed to Carrying the Cross of agape love and fidelity to God's Son, Jesus the Christ. Amen.**