

Contents

Pentecost 15, Proper 18

*Whoever does not carry
the cross and follow me
cannot be my disciple.*

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	Page
1. Lectionary Selection Luke 14:25-33	96
2. Exploring the Pattern	97
3. Reading Between the Lines	100
4. Parallel Readings	102
From:	
<i>The New York Review of Books</i>	
<i>Crucifixion in the Ancient World</i>	
<i>and the Folly of the Message</i>	
<i>of the Cross</i>	
<i>C. G. Jung Letters</i>	
<i>The Fifth Gospel</i>	
5. Critical Background	105
Harvey Cox	

• *Lectionary Readings (Year C)*

Revised Common Lectionary

First Reading	Jeremiah 18:1-11 or Deuteronomy 30:15-20
Second Reading	Philemon 1-21
Gospel	Luke 14:25-33
Psalm	139:1-6, 13-18 or 1

Luke 14:1, 25-33

1 Now large crowds were traveling with him; and he turned and said to them, "Whoever
2 comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and
3 sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the
4 cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a
5 tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to
6 complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who
7 see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to
8 finish.' Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down
9 first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes
10 against him with twenty thousand? If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away,
11 he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. So therefore, none of you can
12 become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

Exploring the Pattern: Themes and Motifs

1. We often forget that every biblical text we have has been translated from another language. Since translation always includes careful choices in the second language the process inevitably involves interpretation.

In the Critical Background for this Sunday, Harvey Cox writes:

The truth is we do not have the original manuscript of one single word of the Bible. All the Bibles we now have are copies, which are therefore prone to errors and insertions, which by their nature are always interpretations that always bear the telltale marks of the eras in which they were done and the theological biases of those who did them.

This week experiment with doing such a translation of a familiar New Testament text. The goal is not to find the right answer or the one true translation but to wonder what might have led to important choices about the text and to consider what is revealed about both ancient scholars and you as today's reader.

2. The New Revised Standard Version, the text used in the *Bible Workbench*, translates Luke 14:27: *Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.*

In the Greek a portion of this sentence reads:

<i>ostis</i>	<i>ou</i>	<i>bastazei</i>	<i>ton</i>	<i>stauron</i>	<i>eauton</i>
whoever	not	bears	the	cross	of his own

A parallel text appears in Matthew 10:38 where the verbs differ—"take up" rather than "bear" and after "cross" Luke has a reflexive pronoun (of his own) while Matthew has a simple possessive pronoun (his).

<i>ou</i>	<i>lambanei</i>	<i>ton</i>	<i>stauron</i>	<i>autou</i>
not	take up	the	cross	of his

Notice now that scholars translate the phrase from Luke differently:

New Revised Standard Version: *Whoever does not carry the cross. . .*

Revised Standard Version: *Whoever does not bear his own cross. . .*

At the Workbench: Pentecost 15, Proper 18

New International Version: *Whoever does not carry his cross. . .*

King James Version: *Whoever does not bear his cross. . .*

Jerusalem Bible: *Whoever does not carry his cross. . .*

New American Standard Bible: *Whoever does not carry his own cross. . .*

3. Jesus is speaking to the crowd about being a disciple. Unless he can see into the future (that some will contend he could have done), Jesus does not yet know the end of the story when he will be crucified. What is he implying, suggesting, wanting here? What kind of “cross”? Is it made out of wood, constructed of metaphor or symbol? Whether he does or doesn’t know his fate, it is a fair question to ask what Jesus and Luke know about a cross. There seems to be general agreement that it was a familiar form of punishment for, and death sentence in, many political offenses against the Roman Empire. It was the favorite form of Roman justice for non-Romans. See this Sunday’s Critical Background.

So what is a cross? What might it symbolize for Jesus? For Luke as well as Matthew? Why might carrying or bearing a cross be a requirement of discipleship? How does one do it?

4. When we look at “cross” in our text, taking seriously the differences in the various translations, important questions are:

- Does Jesus mean discipleship requires carrying the cross? And if so, what is “the” cross?

- Does Jesus mean discipleship requires carrying his (being Jesus’ or the individual’s) cross? And what does “his” cross signify? How is it done?

- Does Jesus mean discipleship requires the listener and would-be follower to carry “his own” cross? And what could this mean? How is it done? What is “one’s own cross” and how does that relate to “the” or Jesus’ cross?

Exploring the Pattern: Themes and Motifs

Luke 14:25-33 • September 5, 2010

Essentially what is the difference between being asked to carry

the cross

his/ Jesus' cross

your own cross?

5. And what difference does it make? So what? One question, of course, is why the various translators chose to render the text they changed from Greek to English as they did. As Cox asks, what do they betray about their era? What telltale marks of intent and of theological bias are there? What are the translators wanting us to read in the text? What is their theological statement? Who is their Jesus?

6. The other question is what difference it makes to you and me. If I am intent upon being a follower of Jesus—a disciple of his in 2010—what is being required of me?

How might you and I carry “the” cross?

How might you and I carry “his,” or Jesus’ cross?

How might you and I carry “your own” cross?

Luke continues by describing the importance of how, before one builds a tower, there is need to first sit down and estimate the cost. He asks what king, before he sets out to battle, does not consider whether he has enough soldiers. So, Jesus tells them, they/ we need to ask what is required for them/us to follow him.

That is a question he asks the crowds. It is also a question he asks us. Do you choose to hear it?

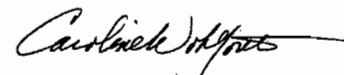
Reading Between the Lines

For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? As little sister, I spent a lot of my childhood sitting on my brother's bedroom floor watching him build towers—and more elaborate structures—with his Erector Set. He drove me mad. He would lay out every piece, every little girder, every tiny bolt, nut, and wheel. He'd study those pieces for what seemed like hours: planning, counting to see if he had enough to build what he had in mind. I wanted to see some action, and I wanted to see it RIGHT NOW. He could not be hurried; and, given time, he would build the most marvelous elevators, pumps, cars, whirligigs. Long, sad experience has taught me the wisdom of his approach.

Are you naturally given to planning, counting the cost of getting into a project, a relationship, or a set of ideas and beliefs? Take a little time to list the benefits to you and others of your way of being. Then maybe take a few more minutes to consider if you may have missed out on anything by your deliberating. Or has it been your bent to leap into building your tower without a complete accounting of its cost? How may you have come to regret your impetuosity? How may it have led you to unexpected benefits?

As I look back over what I've written here, I realize that today—many years since my brother planned his last Erector Set construction—he paints luminous water colors. You may know that a water colorist succeeds when he thinks and plans ahead just how he will lay his colors on the paper. I, however, delight in painting with oils so I can push colors around with abandon and easily cover up my mistakes. Yet I have seen him move spontaneously and joyfully into new ventures, while I have become cautious about making decisions. How can each of us live in the tension between planning ahead and plunging ahead?

How do you?



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Reading Between the Lines

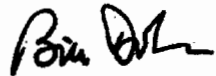
Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple as it appears in the Luke/Matthew parallel can also be found as a parallel in Mark, Matthew, and Luke in another context. Look at:

If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up their cross and follow me (ton stauron autou) [Matthew 16:24]

If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me (ton stauron autou) [Mark 8:34]

If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me (ton stauron autou) [Luke 9:23]

It is interesting that only The New Revised Standard Translation renders the Greek as “their” cross. All the others cited above translate it as “his” cross. Note, as well, that Luke alone adds “daily.” How does this perhaps change or focus your reading of the text?



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For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it?

Some years ago I served on a strategic planning committee for a church organization. At the time, I looked up every reference to “plans” and “planning” in the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, and discovered, to my surprise, that the Bible doesn’t present “planning” in a particularly good light. In fact, this text in Luke is one of the few that talks about careful planning, though it’s not clear that Jesus thinks it’s a particularly good thing; only that his audience will recognize the process.

The only “good” plans are what God has planned; most of the human plans that are mentioned are plans for evil. Yet who among us does not depend on planning—thinking through what our next steps should be, weighing options, making choices?

What might Jesus’ statement: *Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple*, tell us about the role of planning in our lives? What does it do to our planning if we carry the cross? What can we expect? What can we rely on? What might we anticipate?



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Parallel Readings

From the *New York Review of Books*

A Knife at the Door

Believers and nonbelievers have long been drawn to confessions, like Saint Augustine's, that read like dispatches from the knock-down drag-out encounter between God and the stubborn sinner. *Lit*, which probably takes its title from the notion that Karr's salvation—and her sobriety—comes both from her love for literature and her spiritual enlightenment, is one of those. Doubting and wisecracking all the way, Karr succumbs to Christ. She neither moralizes nor proselytizes. Whether we understand it, or like it, or not, this is what happened to her. Perhaps some readers may be tempted to try her solution, while others will find themselves grumpily resisting her spiritual godfather's less-than-persuasive response to her sensible concerns about Saint Paul: "You think Paul's conversion made him some rich cult leader? That's a laugh. He essentially resigned a CPA job to ride with the Hells Angels."

As Karr the seeker is making room for God, Karr the writer is tying up the loose ends of her story. She and her sister travel to Colorado, where the saddest parts of *The Liars' Club* are set, hoping to test their memories against what few landmarks remain. She spends time with Mother, whose aging and diminution Karr's readers will have witnessed over three books. What's happened to Mother is touching, but, like Karr's, our indelible image of her is still that lunatic in the doorway. During a sort of coda, a minor miracle or coincidence involving biblical texts causes Karr to feel a mystical tie to her past:

When you've been hurt enough as a kid (maybe at any age), it's like you have a trick knee. Most of your life, you can function like an adult, but add in the right portions of sleeplessness and stress and grief, and the hurt, defeated self can bloom into place. . . .

Maybe all any of us wants is to feel singled out for some long, sweet, quenching draft of love, some open-throated guzzling of it—like what a baby gets at the breast. The mystery of the Bible passages, marked just for me, does that.

We want Karr to find what she's looking for, and for her story to end well. Her religion is not of the mannerly, hygienic variety, nor is it the hypermuscular sort that steals indigenous people's gold or whips up a Crusade. Even skeptics will agree

Francine Prose, "A Knife at the Door," a review of *Lit: A Memoir*, by Mary Karr, (*New York Review of Books*, Volume 57, Number 3, February 25, 2010).

that her conversion works a positive change: it's an invitation to "enter the presence of the numinous" and a source of comfort that allows her to close her eyes without seeing Mother in the doorway, brandishing that knife.

Francine Prose

From *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross*

Crucifixion as a penalty was remarkably widespread in antiquity. It appears in various forms among numerous peoples of the ancient world, even among Greeks (It) was and remained a political and military punishment. While among the Persians and the Carthaginians it was imposed primarily on high officials and commanders, as on rebels, among the Romans it was inflicted above all on the lower classes, i.e. slaves, violent criminals, and the unruly elements in rebellious provinces, not least in Judaea. The chief reason for its use was its allegedly supreme efficacy as a deterrent; it was, of course, carried out publicly. . . . It was usually associated with other forms of torture, including at least, flogging. . . . By the public display of a naked victim at a prominent place—at a crossroads, in the theatre, on high ground, at the place of his crime—crucifixion also represented numinous dimension to it. With Deuteronomy 21.23 in the background, the Jew in particular was very aware of this. . . . Crucifixion was aggravated further by the fact that quite often its victims were never buried. It was a stereotyped picture that the crucified victim served as food for wild beasts and birds of prey. In this way his humiliation was complete. What it meant for a man in antiquity to be refused burial, and the dishonor which went with it, can hardly be appreciated by modern man.

Martin Hengel

From *C.G. Jung Letters*

To Dorothee Hoch, 3 July, 1952

You refer me to your sermon. You talk there of rebirth, for instance, something the man of antiquity was thoroughly familiar with, but modern man? He has no inkling of the mysteries, which anyway are discredited by Protestant theology, because for it there is only *one* truth, and whatever else God may have done for man is mere bungling. Does modern man know what "water" and "spirit" signify? Water is *below*, heavy and material; wind above and the "spiritual" breath body. The man of

Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977).

Gerhard Adler and Aniela Jaffe, (Eds.), *C.G. Jung Letters*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 75-76.

antiquity understood this as a clash of opposites, a *complexio oppositorum*, and felt this conflict to be so impossible that he equated matter with evil outright. Christ forces man into the impossible conflict. He took himself with exemplary seriousness and lived his life to the bitter end, regardless of human convention and in opposition to his own lawful tradition, as the worst heretic in the eyes of the Jews and a madman in the eyes of his family. But we? We imitate Christ and hope he will deliver us from our own fate. Like little lambs we follow the shepherd, naturally to good pastures. No talk at all of uniting our Above and Below! On the contrary, Christ and *his* cross deliver us from our conflict, which we simply leave alone. We are Pharisees, faithful to law and tradition, we flee heresy and are mindful only of the *imitatio Christi* but not of our own reality which is laid upon us, the union of opposites in ourselves, preferring to believe that Christ has already achieved this for us. Instead of bearing ourselves, i.e., our own cross, ourselves, we load Christ with our unresolved conflicts. We “place ourselves under *his* cross,” but by golly riot under our own. Anyone who does this is a heretic, self-redeemer, “psychoanalyst” and God knows what. The cross of Christ was *borne by himself* and was *his*. To put oneself under somebody else’s cross, which has already been carried by him, is certainly easier than to carry your own cross amid the mockery and contempt of the world. That way you remain nicely ensconced in tradition and are praised as devout. This is well-organized Pharisaism and highly un-Christian. Whoever imitates Christ and has the cheek to want to take Christ’s cross on himself when he can’t even carry his own has in my view not yet learnt the ABC of the Christian message.

Gerhard Adler and Aniela Jaffe

From *The Fifth Gospel*

Gospel of Thomas

Saying 55

Jesus says: “Whoever does not hate his father and his mother cannot become a disciple of mine.

And whoever does not hate his brothers and his sisters (and) will not take up his cross as I do, will not be worthy of me.

Stephen J Patterson and James M Robinson, (Eds.), *The Fifth Gospel: The Gospel of Thomas Comes of Age*, (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), p. 20.

Critical Background

From *The Future of Faith*

Translation has stirred up both linguistic and theological issues since the early year of Christianity. In the third century Origen tackled it, assembling an edition of the Old Testament that set six different versions in parallel columns. A huge tome, it included the original Hebrew text, then a phonetic transcription of the Hebrew in Greek letters, similar to the English phonetic notes found today in some Conservative and Reformed synagogue prayer books. Next came a very literal translation of the same text in Greek, then another Greek translation in more idiomatic Greek. Next to that was the Septuagint and finally yet another translation into what was then “modern Greek.” The whole work is called the Hexapla (“Sixfold”). It required an immense expenditure of labor, but Origen placed the columns side by side so that readers could compare them. He wanted to demonstrate as clearly as possible how disparate the different translations of the same passage can be. Which of those six columns do our Bible believers believe? The Hexapla was a monumental accomplishment, and it represents a formidable challenge to anyone who contends, as the fundamentalists still do, that the words and sentences of “*the Bible*” contain one self-evident meaning.

Harvey Cox

Harvey Cox, *The Future of Faith*, (New York: Harper-Collins, 2009), pp. 158-159.

