

“Labor of Love”
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September 4, 2016
Menifee United Church of Christ

Factory workers, a woman and a man, are talking. The woman says, “I’ll bet I can get the boss to give me the rest of the day off.” The man says, “How you gonna do that?” The woman says, “Just watch me.” So she climbs up to the ceiling and hangs upside down from the rafters. The boss comes in and says, “What do you think you’re doing?” She says, “I’m a light bulb.” The boss says, “Whoa, I guess I’ve been working you way too hard. You can take the rest of the day off.” So she climbs down and starts walking out and the man walks out with her. The boss says, “Where do you think you’re going?” He says, “I’m going home. I can’t work in the dark.” They say we’re supposed to love what we do for a living, that what we do for a living should be a labor of love. Whether we work in a factory or a furniture store. Whether we work in a restaurant or a retirement home. Whether we work in a fire house or the White House. We should love what we do for a living. It should be a labor of love. Whatever you do for a living, I hope it’s a labor of love. Whether you work inside the home or outside the home. If you’re retired, I hope that whatever you did was a labor of love. Whether you worked inside the home or outside the home. Whatever we do for a living, we should love what we do. It should be a labor of love.

Radio, for me, was a labor of love. I worked in radio my first job. I worked as a disc jockey. It was in a beautiful music station. I played elevator music. My second radio job was as the news director at a Christian radio station. This was back before I was much of a Christian. Then, the job I really liked, my favorite job, was being a radio talk show host on an NPR station. That was a labor of love for me. I was a liberal radio talk show host, as you might imagine. I would talk about equality for women, equal rights for minorities, peace in the face of war. Hmmm, come to think of it, as a liberal radio talk show host, I talked pretty much about the same kinds of things I talk about as a liberal Christian minister. But it was a labor of love for me. I loved what I did and now I love what I do. This is a labor of love to me and one thing I strive to do is be a disciple of Jesus. But how do you do that?

Jesus tells us how to be his disciples. Jesus says in Luke Chapter 14 that in order to be his disciple you have to carry the cross, you have to follow Jesus, and then you can be Jesus’ disciple. But what does that mean? What does it mean to “carry the cross?” What does it mean to “follow Jesus?” And what does it mean to be Jesus’ disciple? I thought the only thing you have to do to be Jesus’ disciple is to ask Jesus into your heart. Or I thought the only thing you had to do to be Jesus’ disciple was to make Jesus your Lord and Savior. Or I thought the only thing you had to do to become Jesus’ disciple was to be born again. But apparently not. Jesus says that to be his disciple you have to carry the cross, and you have to follow Jesus. Then you can be Jesus’ disciple.

Marcus Borg says it’s not easy to be Jesus’ disciple. Marcus Borg, the late liberal theologian, who wrote the book “The Heart of Christianity.” In that book Marcus Borg says that Jesus wasn’t just killed. Jesus wasn’t just executed, Jesus was crucified. They crucified him because they hated him so much. And they hated him so much because he was a “social prophet.” He was a “movement initiator.” And he was “a passionate advocate for God’s justice.” Plus, he had a huge following. When Jesus preached, he preached to thousands and thousands and thousands of people. He was a mega-church pastor before there were mega-churches. That’s why they hated him so much, because he had such a huge following. Marcus Borg says that if Jesus was just a healer, or if Jesus was just a mystic, and he didn’t have that huge following, the powers that be wouldn’t have cared about him. But the powers that be hated him. Because he was a social prophet. Because he was a movement initiator. Because he was a passionate advocate for God’s justice. And he opposed the powers that be and the powers that be hated that. The religious leaders of Jesus’ day were all about rules and regulations. That’s what they saw in the scriptures. But Jesus said No. If you read the Scriptures right they’re all about forgiveness and love. The religious leaders of Jesus’ day were all about controlling people, keeping them under their thumb. But Jesus said, essentially, no. You have freedom. You can be who you want to be. You can be the people that God has meant you to be. That’s why the religious leaders of Jesus’ day didn’t just kill him, didn’t just execute him, but crucified him. Crucified him. And what did they do before they crucified him? They made him carry the cross. And that’s how we follow Jesus, by carrying a cross, by being social prophets. By being movement initiators. By being passionate advocates for God’s justice. By risking everything. Everything. The way Jesus did.

Moses tells us how to follow God. In Deuteronomy chapter 30, Moses says we follow God by following God’s ways, following the way of God. I think that’s also how we follow Jesus, by following the way of Jesus. But how to we follow the way of Jesus? For the answer to that, because this is a universal truth, I’m going to turn to another faith leader to give us the answer to how do we follow Jesus.

The Dalai Lama is not a Christian, of course, he’s a Buddhist. But the Dalai Lama has a view of religion similar to Jesus’ view of religion. The Dalai Lama says, “My religion is simple. My religion is kindness.” I think Jesus would say the same thing. By practicing kindness, we follow Jesus. By feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and welcoming

the stranger, we practice kindness and we follow Jesus. By loving God, by loving our neighbor, and by loving ourselves, we are practicing kindness and following Jesus. That's how we follow Jesus. By judging not. By loving our enemies. And by forgiving everyone, we are practicing kindness and we are following Jesus.

The Apostle Paul gives us another way to follow Jesus. The Apostle Paul, in his letter to Philemon, says: I pray that you continue to share your faith. That's what it means to follow Jesus. To share our faith. To share our church. How do we share our faith? How do we share our church? Well, the person to me that probably does the best job of sharing our faith and sharing our church is our own Diomy Alexander. (She's gone to take care of our luncheon.) But Diomy says that she shares our faith and shares our church with her neighbors. Diomy says that she shares our faith and shares our church with people standing in line at the grocery store. And Diomy says that she shares our faith and shares our church with just about everyone. And that's how we follow Jesus, by sharing our faith and sharing our church. So if we want to follow Jesus, maybe what we need to do is follow Diomy!

Colin Kaepernick probably has some idea of what it's like to be hated the way Jesus was. You probably know that he's the quarterback of the San Francisco 49ers and he refuses to stand for the national anthem. I saw a clip about this the other day on the news. Almost the entire stadium booed him. Another teammate sat with him during the national anthem. Colin Kaepernick says he refuses to stand for the national anthem because of the suffering of African Americans and people of color in the U.S. in the past and in the present. So I guess you could say that Colin Kaepernick does not think that America is great already right now. Another person who thinks America is not great right now, says that Colin Kaepernick should leave the country because he does not think America is great right now. I found irony in that, maybe you don't. So what is the old saying? "America, love it or leave it." But why not "America, love it or fix it?" Why not try to eliminate the suffering of African Americans and other people of color? Why not try to eliminate that? I think when we do that, we're following Jesus. Now some people think that Jesus is a conservative, evangelical, patriotic American. Of course, he's not. But I do wonder what Jesus would do if he came to this country. You know, assuming he isn't deported with the other 11 million illegal immigrants. If Jesus came to this country and saw the suffering that African Americans and other people of color go through, would Jesus refuse to stand for the national anthem? I wonder about that. I think that Jesus would at least say let's eliminate the suffering of African Americans and other people of color. Because when we do that, we're following Jesus. And that would be great.

King David says we are a great people. We must be because in Psalm 130 King David writes, "We are fearfully and wonderfully made." Think about that. We are fearfully and wonderfully made by God. Now I believe we are fearfully and wonderfully made by God to carry the cross, to follow Jesus, and to be Jesus' disciples. And that should be what we do for life. That should be our labor of love.

Wendell Berry, I believe, follows Jesus. Wendell Berry wrote a novel a few years ago called "A Place in Time." In that novel, Wendell Berry tells about a woman. He says she has heart trouble. He says maybe she has heart trouble because she gives her heart away to everybody who needs it. That's what we're to do. We're to carry the cross. We're to follow Jesus. And we're to be Jesus' disciple. And then we will have heart trouble. Because then we will give our heart away to everyone who needs it.

Let us pray:
*God of Love,
Help us to carry the cross.
Help us to follow Jesus.
And help us to be Jesus' disciples.
Now and forevermore.
By the power of the Holy Spirit.
And in the name of Jesus.
Amen.*

*(This sermon was delivered without manuscript or notes,
and was transcribed from a tape recording of it.)*
