Spiritual Maturity Sermon for June 25 Matthew 10: 24-39

Genesis 21: 8-21

Psalm 86: 1-10

Romans 6: 1b-11

Matthew 10: 24-39

Let me introduce you to my old briefcase.

When someone asks me why I don't get a new briefcase, I'm reminded of something Kawhi Leonard said. For those of you who don't recognize the name, Kawhi Leonard is one of the two or three greatest basketball players in the world. He plays for the San Antonio Spurs, and he's notoriously frugal. Although he's ridiculously wealthy, he lives in a modest two-bedroom apartment, and uses coupons when he dines. More to the point, he drives a '97 Chevy Tahoe, the same vehicle he drove in high school. When he was asked during an interview why he still drives that old car, his answer summed up the essence of the way a truly frugal person looks at life. He said: *It still runs and it's paid for.*

As if, compared to those, all other considerations are insignificant.

And that's sort of how I feel about this old briefcase. Yes, it's a little rough around the edges but...it still holds stuff. And it's paid for!

What does that have to do with our Gospel reading for today, you might be wondering. Well, for that, I have to tell you something else about this briefcase.

You see, a couple of years ago, this old briefcase seemed like it was about ready to give up the ghost. It was literally coming apart at the seams, and the leather had ripped here and there so the wire frame was sticking through. The bottom line was that it seemed like its time was pretty much up.

But one day I was lamenting this situation to a friend of mine, and she happened to be someone who raised horses. Right up the road from her, she told me, there was an Amish harness maker who did all the repair work on her horses' livery. Maybe he could take a look at my briefcase, she suggested, and tell me if it was a lost cause.

Now, I delayed going for a while, because I was afraid that the Amish harness maker might tell me that it was beyond saving, the same way we often avoid going to the doctor because we don't really want to know what's wrong.

But one day I finally came to the place where I just said to myself, "OK, what will be, will be. I'll just go along with whatever he says." In my heart, even though I've had that briefcase longer than I can remember, longer than I've ever owned anything, and even though it's been faithfully by my side during every twist and turn of my life, I let it go at last, and headed out towards Knowlesville Road.

Long story short, after examining it carefully, the harness maker said he thought it was not beyond salvation, and sure enough, when I got a call from him a couple weeks later and drove back to Knowlesville Road, he presented me with this repaired and restored and handsome creation you see before you today!

What I want to draw attention to in telling you this little episode is not how nice it was and how good it felt to have my old briefcase repaired and serviceable again, or even the relief I felt in my half Scottish heart over not having to pay our for a new one.

What I want to draw attention to is how there was a really special quality to the whole experience that derived from the fact that I had truly and fully resigned myself to the possible reality of letting my briefcase go, of giving it up. Emotionally speaking, I had cut my ties with it, and so when i learned it could be saved and then saw it again for the first time, it was in some way as if I were not just getting my old briefcase back, but as if I were getting something brand new.

I know that might sound a little precious, but it really was the reality of it: having accepted the loss of my old friend, its return to me carried with it a wholly new and unexpected quality of experience.

And i think that's at least part of the meaning of the point Jesus is making when he sums up the message of our gospel reading for today by with the following promise:

*Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.*

Let's see if we can unpack that a little.

The imagery Jesus uses leading up to this final summation is very strong and very harsh:

*10:34 "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.  
10:35 For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;  
10:36 and one's foes will be members of one's own household.  
10:37 Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me;  
10:38 and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me.*

The parallel passage in Luke's gospel is even harsher:

“*If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple.*[***27***](http://biblehub.com/luke/14-27.htm)*And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."*(14: 26-27)

Very often when they hear this and other similarly harsh words from Jesus,preachers and commentators will argue that the words aren't to be taken literally but rather that Jesus is simply saying something along the lines of "You must make me the priority in your life."

And of course that's true, as far as it goes. But typically, I think, it doesn't go very far. And it doesn't go far because typically, those who offer that as an interpretation will then look at their own life and discover, lo and behold, that there's really nothing much in it that needs changing. For them, for most people, I'm afraid, being reminded that, as a professing Christian, we are committed to giving Christ the priority in our lives, doesn't lead to any changes at all. Nothing needs to be taken away; nothing needs to be added. It adds no complication to my life whatsoever; it comes at no cost whatsoever. And it sounds so good to say it, so pious and religious.

But if that is the common result of 'giving Jesus the priority in my life,' then we are left wondering why Jesus sums his message up with such strong language. In Luke's version, Jesus immediately compares those who seek to be his followers but who don't consider the cost involved to foolish builders and impetuous generals, and he concludes: "So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."

And in our passage from Matthew, to repeat, he concludes:

*Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.*

As Christians, as followers of Christ, we are asked to do one thing, and without doing that one thing, we remain forever as spiritual babes in Christ. What is that one thing? It is to give up our lives.

That's the whole point of Paul's message in Romans.:

*6:3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?  
6:4 Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in the newness of life.  
6:5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.  
6:6 We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin.  
6:7 For whoever has died is freed from sin.  
6:8 But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.  
6:9 We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.  
6:10 The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.  
6:11 So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

Whatever life we have - whether it's the life of a drunken their or the life of a cheerful and productive church-goer, whether we're satisfied with our lives or whether we hate them, whether we're proud or ashamed, it doesn't matter. Whatever life we have, our very first responsibility as a Christian is to let it be crucified along with Christ.

Then, and only then, are we spiritually prepared to begin the never-ending journey becoming mature in Christ. And how do we do that? By giving Christ the priority, with respect to every single thing in our lives. By handing over to Him every single thing in our lives - up to and even including our fathers and mothers and children - and letting Him decide what to do about them, just as I put old briefcase in the hands of that Amish harness maker.

Let's be real for a minute. Not every father belongs in the life of a Christian adult, even if they're genetically related. Nor every mother. Nor every child. The potential cost of following Jesus is that he might lead you to that conclusion about one's own father, or one's own child. Or some of our friends. Or some of our habits. Or some of our activities. or perhaps more importantly, some of our treasured ways of thinking and reacting, and of dealing with the world.

*"Therefore if any one be in Christ, that person is a new creation: old things are passed away; behold,****all****things are become new."* (2 Cor. 5: 17)

All things. Every single thing.

Sounds pretty overwhelming, doesn't it? That's because it is. I's the simplest thing in the world to become a Christian. It's the most difficult thing in the world to become a mature Christian. Fortunately we have an eternity to accomplish it, and the help of Christ Himself. I think that’s the deep meaning of what we read in the fifth chapter of John Gospel:

*For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, , so also the Son gives life to whom He will. The Father judges no one, but has given all judgement to the Son. (21-22)*

And here's the other fortunate thing. Submitting the things in our lives to Christ's appraisal is not the same as eliminating them. On the contrary. Learn the lesson of the beautiful briefcase. Our hope and expectation - provided our lives are not hopelessly corrupt - will be to receive them back with Christ's seal of Approval, and perhaps with instructions on how they might work even better in our new life. I think that's the deep meaning of what Christ is promising us when he says in the 19th Chapter of this same Gospel of Matthew:

*And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.*(19: 29)

And so, Gracious God, our prayer for this morning and this message is that You strengthen us in spirit for the bearing of that most difficult of all spiritual responsibilities, that of bringing our own lives under the loving but unrelenting scrutiny of Your own Son, whom You have appointed to be the judge of all of us, and in whose name we pray.