

September 4, 2016 16th Sunday after Pentecost
Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope

Deuteronomy 30:15-20, Philemon 1-21
Luke 14:25-33

MPR Presents 08/08/16 Aspen Ideas Festival, David Brooks and Arthur Brooks.
David Lose on Davidlose.net for this date, posted on 08/30/2016.

Let us pray. May the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable

Grace and peace to you, beloved of Christ.

With a Gospel like today's, I trust it is clear that our congregation relies faithfully on the scripture texts assigned for each Sunday—the Revised Common Lectionary, it is called.

Because if I had my druthers and if it was my choice, or Zach's choice, or most anyone else's choice, we might have noted the long Labor Day holiday weekend as summer comes to a close, the last dregs of the State Fair, the start of school for everybody from the littlest in high-five to first year students beginning university or college or seminary, to faculty and staff, and everyone in between.

If we had our druthers, we would have sniffed the air and detected just the faintest hint of the food truck. If we had our druthers, we would have closed our eyes and felt the music yet to come, and offered a little prayer that Welcome Back Students is truly a gathering of students and neighbors and the congregation. If we had our druthers, we might have picked a reading that is easier, lighter, with a good vibe for these sweet days as summer becomes fall, and life flows on.

Instead, in today's Gospel, Jesus shakes his head and all-too clearly uses strong words like hate: Whoever does not hate father and mother, spouse and child, siblings, even life itself, can't be my disciple. Oh, and it doesn't stop there: whoever does not carry the cross and follow me, can't be my disciple. Just in case you missed any of the rest of it, sort of as a non sequitur, sort of like all caps and underlined and bold, he concludes: none of you can become my disciples if you don't give up all your possessions. If I had my druthers, I might just sit down right now... but I have to tell you, the phrase rumbling around for me, all week, as I've read and reread and studied and prayed and listened to this gospel is **All In**. In fact, if I were going to title this sermon, that would be the title, **All In**. As in, are we **all in**? Fully in?

Early in August, after a really productive, I'd even say exciting, meeting with the search team for our new Community Engagement Coordinator (incidentally he's here today, we'll introduce Nicholas later), as I was driving home that night, I caught a snippet of an MPR show from the Aspen Ideas Festival

David Brooks and Arthur Brooks (no relation) were dialoguing about finding meaning in our work.

I was so intrigued by the program that when I went on retreat last week, up to St. John's University, to the

Abbey, with some of my closest colleagues, we listened to and discussed chunks of that same show.

The line that stuck out to me was about choosing work, choosing, we might say, vocation.

Arthur or David (I couldn't tell which) asked some good questions about work, but really about life:

Who can I serve? What am I pouring my love into? Am I all in?

And then, as if channeling Jesus' words today, they doubled down: "What pains are you willing to endure?

What would you do if you weren't afraid of anything?"

Am I All In?

Quite simply, I think that's Jesus question, his point, in our gospel today. Are you all in?

He's on the way to Jerusalem, headed directly to the cross, Jesus is All In.

He wants this large crowd to contemplate commitment just as seriously as he does.

Jesus' point about family has been a source of plenty of discussion and writing over the centuries.

I'm honestly not convinced he thinks we should walk away from family ties (and I'd add, there is plenty of

discipleship and commitment and blood and sweat and tears in family life), but rather that we should

consider how we hold family: lightly, firmly, with trust, with grace.

Remember what it's like to hold a newborn infant? lightly, firmly; knowing the messy-ness of our lives,

trusting the grace and forgiveness that we need so desperately.

Oh, our idols are many, and quite honestly family and work and expectations and money and power and

wealth, they are so often our idols, and sometimes it is best to fully walk away, Jesus nails it, but I think

he's also asking, Are you All In? Can you be all in?

Will I be the one you worship? Or, quite plainly, will it be your family, or your stuff?

Jesus knows life doesn't go well for us when something is between us and him, between us and God.

Then we get pulled into choosing, making it an either/or, rather than seeing all of our life, our family, our

work, our courses, as the embodiment of our discipleship, as part of the cross we carry.

Are we All In? That's what Jesus wants to know.

David Lose writes, Jesus is "inviting us to a full-bodied Christian faith that stands over and against all those things that are often presented to us as life by the culture.

Jesus invites us, that is, to the kind of abundant life that is discovered only as you give yourself away."

Are we All In?

Over the last weeks of summer, I had a number of chances to visit with some of you who are teachers or educators or work in our schools and at the university.

In all those conversations there was that bittersweet end of summer feeling (a feeling echoed, too, by most of the students I talked with—of every ages); bittersweet, and at once there was a palpable eagerness: this is what God has given me to do, this is how I do it, I'm in, I'm ready, I'm called.

They don't always say it, but they know some days there will be tears, and some days they are going to be leaning into all the support community can muster, and some days they are going to be on that mountain feeling like this is what it's all about.

Students have some of those very same feelings.

This season, my prayer is simple, may we be All In.

It's my prayer for students and educators,

it's my prayer for our community of faith on this edge of Dinkytown, this University community,
seeking to make our walls porous,

it's my prayer for each of us:

May we be All In.

May we be willing to bring our own messy lives, our unfinished dreams, our yearning for grace and belonging, our world's tremendous injustice and our readiness to be part of the healing.

And may we let God work in us, through us, doing what we can't help but do, not out of fear, but because we have this inkling that we are part of Christ's body and we are All In. Amen.