

September 4, 2022 13th Sunday after Pentecost
Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope

Deuteronomy 30:15-20,
Philemon 1-21, Luke 14:25-27

[Double Fudge by Judy Blume, page 10. SALT Commentary for this date quoting Barbara Brown Taylor:

<https://www.saltproject.org/progressive-christian-blog/2019/9/3/giving-up-salts-lectionary-commentary-for-thirteenth-week-after-pentecost>. My own sermon from 9-8-19 at University Lutheran Church of Hope.]

Grace and peace to you, beloved of Christ Jesus. Amen

To say that this morning's readings are challenging... is an understatement:

Whoever does not hate parents, and spouse and child, siblings, kin, indeed life itself, cannot be my disciple.

Whoever does not take up their cross and follow, cannot be my disciple.

And this little section concludes (and this part we didn't read, but it's there):

"None of you can become my disciples if you do not give up all your possessions." (vs. 33)

At our house we've been on a Judy Blume kick the last year or so.

In her books geared toward older children and teens,

Judy Blume is known for tackling the *harder stuff* with honesty and humor.

In *Double Fudge*, Peter Hatcher's little brother,

five year old "Fudge", becomes fascinated with money.

Every night, Fudge counts up his money; a process he calls "mising" (like being a miser).

At breakfast, he practices writing dollar signs on the back of the Cheerios box.

He creates his own money, which he calls "Fudge bucks."

He continually embarrasses his family by asking grown-ups about their financial situations.

At the dinner table, he tries to convince his dad to pay him for passing the salt.

One night, big brother Peter, recalls:

"We could hear Fudge as he started to sing, '*Oh, money, money, money...*'

I love money, money, money, money...'

As soon as he stopped Uncle Feather, his myna bird, started,

'*Ooooo, money, money, money...*'

... Dad called, 'Fudge... cover Uncle Feather's cage and get to sleep.'

'Uncle Feather's *mising* his money,' Fudge called back. 'He's not ready to go to sleep.'

'How did this happen to us?' Mom asked. 'We've always worked hard. We spend carefully.'

And we never talk about money in front of the children.'

'Maybe that's the problem,' [Peter] told them.'

Today's readings, and particularly the gospel, take a page from Judy Blume's books.

They don't shy from talking about the hard stuff, the often complex realities.

You heard it in the gospel.

Hate your family—so strong.

Hate life itself—that's confusing, it's painful.

It feels like we're being asked to choose between the call to follow Jesus and the call to be family,
so it touches us where we may be tender already.

I wonder though, if this isn't so much prescribing that we must hate family,
but rather describing a gospel that won't settle for just a portion of ourselves, a slice of our lives.

The crowds had been so eager, and now as Jesus turns toward the cross,

he ratchets up the expectations of what discipleship will look like.

Discipleship asks us to consider everything,

even our relationships with those most dear to us,

even our possessions, our impulse like Fudge's, to make and save money, to acquire stuff,

even, and especially, our decisions.

Our Gospels is asking us to *make following Jesus our way*.

But how do we learn to be disciples?

At our best we follow those who have gone before us.

The ancestors in the faith.

But also those at our sides whose walk we value,

whose decisions we notice,

whose prayers we've experienced.

Preacher Barbara Brown Taylor, preaching on this very passage from Luke, read the passage and began,

"If any of you came here this morning believing that you were disciples of Jesus Christ,

then I guess that you know better now."

Perhaps, then, when we're honest we are less like "disciples" and more like "friends of the disciples."

Yes, of course, there are disciples in our midst, in every generations, folks like Dietrich Bonhoeffer,

Oscar Romero, and Dorothy Day,

and more common folks as well, who broke with family, who gave up possessions.

The rest of us, Barbara Brown Taylor suggests, we're "friends of the disciples". (this section borrows a lot from SALT, see reference list)

"Like friends, we may extol and support disciples where we can;

and like friends, we may be inspired (or haunted, or driven) to follow their examples intermittently, in fragments or moments or chapters of our lives."

Disciples and friends of the disciples, I think Barbara Brown Taylor may be on to something.

(This section above borrows a lot from SALT, see reference list)

I've been thinking about Fudge's mom when she muses about how Fudge is so obsessed with money. His mom says, "We never talk about money in front of the children."

Beloved, maybe that's the point about money, and about discipleship, about life, about all this hard stuff:

**Jesus is asking us to very intentionally talk about it, to act it out,
in front of our kids and with our community,
for that's how THEY learn, and that's how WE learn.**

On a long holiday weekend, when things like the state fair, and school prep,

and yard work, and picnics may be on the agenda, this can feel heavy, I know.

But it also feels somehow appropriate, Fudge knew that.

Following Jesus, we should attend to how we interact with money and with our relationships.

Money is at the heart of everything, it seems. It's the water we swim in, the air we breathe.

So let's observe Labor Day thinking about labor and the labor movement,

about how to build an economy with a living wage.

So then let's talk about reparations.

Let's consider the inequity of inherited wealth.

Let's figure out how to choose life, the complexity of life, the climate's life, in our investments and our giving.

Let's lean into the village and how we are truly the village for and with one another.

I know many of you are thinking about these things already, and acting on them—this give me great hope.

Dear friends in Christ, today's gospel can seem impossible.

It can make us squirm because it is real, so very real.

We could *keep on*, we could let the status quo lull us, even as the divisions and anger and fears rise.

But something bigger is happening and something greater is being asked of us.

Pick up your cross, beloved, and follow. Choose life.

Let grace guide you, and follow.

We don't do this on our own, but rather in community.

We don't do this overnight, but day by day, week by week, year by year.

We don't do this by our sheer will, but with God's grace, with the Spirit's power, in Jesus' way.

Last Saturday Stephen Ganzkow-Wold died, he was 70 years old.

This afternoon we'll gather here in this space at 1pm for a Celebration of Steve's Faith and Life.

As we do when members of this community die,

we take time this morning to remember Steve's life and his faith, and to pray.

Steve and his spouse Cyndi joined University Lutheran Church of Hope in their retirement and over these years they have lived with the realities and evolution of Steve's Parkinson's diagnosis.

Steve was born in Decorah, Iowa and as a pastor's kid moved around calling the Los Angeles area home.

He and Cyndi met at Luther Seminary, both being ordained as pastors in what became the ELCA.

Together they served rural parishes in the northwest corner of South Dakota, in the city of Aberdeen, many years in the Madison area of Wisconsin, and later as an interim pastor here in the Twin Cities metro.

Steve was both a pastor and a counselor, serving in congregations,

later as a psychologist in Madison, and

and on the staff of the ELCA churchwide office in Chicago with a focus on health and wellness.

Steve was an athlete and cheered for the Cubs.

He loved gardening and contributing to a community to make it more beautiful.

Steve spent a stint as the garbologist at Holden Village.

And he a torch bearer for the Lake Placid Winter Olympics and witnessed the Miracle on Ice.

Steve enjoyed humor, and he didn't shy from talking about the hard stuff.

Steve loved God and his family.

This past Monday would have been Steve and Cyndi's 46th Anniversary.

They have two children, and five grandchildren who called Steve Poppy.

When members of this congregation die,

we remember how the waters that first washed over them in baptism, hold them now in death.

We pray at the baptismal waters, linking ourselves to God's powerful waters of promise. [FONT]

Holy God, holy and powerful, we remember before you today our brother Stephen. We thank you for giving him to us to know and to love as a companion in our pilgrimage on earth. At the waters of baptism, you welcomed him into your love. At these waters, you comforted him in times of trouble and encouraged him in delight. At these waters, you now enfold him into Jesus' death and resurrection and the promise of life everlasting. Console us who mourn and bring us together to feast with all the saints of God. In Jesus' mercy we pray. Amen.