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Sermon #456 Trinity Church – Swarthmore, Pennsylvania
8:00 and 10:00 a.m. Celebrations of the Holy Eucharist
The Fifteenth Sunday Pentecost – September 9, 2007

“A Leap of Faith”

Scripture: Luke 14:25-33; Proper 18, Year C
Notes: My first sermon from the pulpit with Trinity Church, Swarthmore.

I think it's a good question that Jesus puts before us this morning. I mean, who *would* take on something important without thinking it through, without being sure of all the details and nuances and requirements and potential pitfalls before starting? Who would ever take a chance on building or buying a home without being absolutely certain they could afford it in the long-run? Who would ever go to war without thoroughly sizing up the opposition and being completely certain of how to overwhelm the enemy quickly and bring about lasting peace?

- Who would start a new business without guaranteed success?
- Or send their kids off to college without enough money *already* in the bank to cover the costs for four full years?
- Who would ever get married after knowing each other just a short time?
- What student would ever start working on a big assignment right before it is due?
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Or what congregation would call a new priest and his family, nearly sight unseen, and welcome them to town as though they had been friends for ages, provide them a home, invite them into the ongoing life and hopes of a worshipping community without knowing every little thing there is to know about them? Who would ever do that?

Well, I'm glad to say that *you* already have. As a congregation, you have already welcomed my family and me with open arms. And we don't know every little thing there is to know about one another. We don't even know all the big things! We don't know exactly what directions we will take in life and ministry together as Trinity Church. Nevertheless, we have embarked together on an important work, a major work, a real adventure of life and spirit with one another that will matter deeply to our personal lives of faith, to this entire congregation, and to the community and world around us. And have we, as Jesus recommends, really considered all the details, all the requirements all the costs?

Now, don't get too nervous. When you think about it, we do this kind of thing all the time. We're always moving forward in directions we may not have expected and for which we haven't fully planned. Life can sometimes make this unavoidable. So much coming at us that we do undertake important things like school or marriage or jobs or retirement or community leadership or public service or religion without giving them all the thought, all the consideration,

all the deep introspection and prayer that they might require and deserve. And often we may even say these things take "...a leap of faith."

And, frankly, I think Jesus understands that. In fact, I think it makes his point this morning all the more meaningful. When it comes to living a life of faith, it really matters what we put our faith in. Will it be faith in our possessions? In our associations with others? There are some hard lessons that may have to be learned along the way about where our faith ultimately must lie. Jesus says there is nothing we have and nothing of which we are a part that is more crucial to our lives than living faithfully to God, and so he teaches us to consider the cost of such a life of faith, and when necessary, to give up those things that do not support that life.

Now that's a bit easier said than done. I, for one, know that there are things that are dear to me that I intend to retain. Only this past week, for example, I received a kind gift from the ladies of the *Thrift Shop* of a genuine cast-iron cornbread mold that makes the little corn muffins come out of the oven shaped like corn on the cob. It's great. Reminds me of how my grandmother used to cook. And I don't intend to give that up, unless... it were to come between me and my ability to live faithfully to Jesus. Or my home, I don't intend to give up that place where I live... unless somehow my home keeps me from somehow being able to serve others in Jesus' name. My job? No, I would never give up my job. But what if my job would not allow me to act with the principals of honesty and goodness and truthfulness and mercy and generosity embodied in the life of Christ? What then?

And my family? Is Jesus really asking me to "hate" them for the sake of the Gospel? Personally, I don't think that "hate" and "gospel" ever go together. After all, gospel means "good news", and what does hate have to do in support of that? I believe he is teaching, and quite forcefully so, that where our relations with family and others are not life-giving or faithful, we may have to move in different directions to find that which God is offering and requiring of us. But to "give up" one's family for the sake of faith is not to "give up on them." One can always hope for, work for, new understanding, healed relationship, reconciliation, even love, the very same things God is working to have with us.

But that doesn't mean it will be easy. When I consider the challenges and the costs of the apparently risky life of faith in God, when I think of what we may have to give up and what we may have to take on to do it, I agree with Jesus: "What king, going out to wage war against another king, will not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace."

Well, God, I give! I can't live perfectly faithfully on my own. I can't overcome every temptation, every hardship without your aid. None of us can. We don't live lives of Christian faith never falling short, never missing the mark, never experiencing doubts. But we can ask for the terms of peace with God. We can commit ourselves to live by those terms. And, frankly, we have known them for a long time, because Jesus spoke them for us:

- Do not worry about what you shall eat or drink or what you shall wear, but seek first the kingdom of God and all these other things will be added to you...

- When someone strikes you on the cheek, turn to him the other...
- Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you...
- Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven...
- Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as you love yourself.

These are the terms that bring peace. These are the very things upon which you and I will work together in the days, weeks, and years to come. And though today we don't know everything there is to know of one another, I'm ready to jump in, to take that "leap of faith", not fully knowing all the costs, not even fully counting them, trusting that God will be with us and lead us where we need to be.