

Sunday, July 2, 2017 - Third Sunday after Pentecost
The Premiere Discipleship Bundle

Matthew 10: 34-42

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Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

I get the same junk mail offer once or twice a week, from different companies. It's not even worth opening the envelopes. Sometimes the offer is printed right on the envelope itself. For only \$149.95 a month! What a steal! Add home telephone service and home security to your cable and internet package today and save!

It's called bundling – and a lot of businesses are doing it, whether it's telecommunications, the travel industry, insurance or even the concept of “value meals” at fast food restaurants. The more services you combine with one company, the greater percentage discount you'll receive.

There's just one problem – what if I don't want what's bundled? Actually, I want more options to buy a la carte! What if I don't want to pay for channels I don't watch, or things I won't use at the all-inclusive resort, or that old ratty couch your spouse has had since before you were married. Can't we just customize it all to our preferences?

For some things maybe, but we have to learn to accept that most of life is filled with package deals. That goes for our perfect God, too. You might think well, He's perfect, maybe I won't suffer anything with Him. After all, He is perfect. Who in their right mind would not want something offered by God?

Be careful – this all-inclusive deal may be more than we expect. Behold: The Premiere Discipleship Package, comprised of the following four parts.

Piece # 1. Your life will be dedicated to Jesus' mission. Our Gospel text today is actually the ending of a larger speech Jesus makes to His disciples, where He sends them out to heal and drive out demons among lost people, all in His name. He tells them, “Go rather to the lost

sheep of Israel. As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' A couple of things are striking about this command. It is urgent – go. Get up and go, now. The kingdom of heaven is near – it will not wait. There are people who need to hear. Just as Jesus sends His disciples then, He sends His disciples now. This is our command today.

This brings us to an important truth about Jesus. Disciples of Jesus submit completely to His will. Disciples do not live for themselves, their own goals. The package deal that comes with being a disciple of Jesus is that we must set aside our own pride, our desire to come first, our individuality and admit that the single most important thing in my life, my very identity, is Jesus who lives in me. Living as Jesus' disciple comes before my need to be well-liked, or impressing others. It means my priorities are ordered with my relationship with God at the very top – above family, above work, above friends, above hobbies and leisure, above politics, above patriotism. My very life is a living confession of Jesus Christ as Lord, who comes first above all things.

Buyer beware! Jesus is not the genie in the lamp. God's purpose is not to grant our wishes but to further His plan.

Disappointed? Know that God's plan is good. It is to call those who are lost to believe in Him, and also be disciples. His mission for us is to be participants in that great plan. It's not only Jesus' mission, it's His disciples' mission, too, and it is the most important thing in the world, even as Jesus is the most important thing in our lives.

Piece #2 of this package – as we go about God's mission opposition and even hostility against us is not only possible, it should be expected.

Not a very effective sales pitch. You might be thinking, "OK, Jesus overtaking my identity is one thing, but now you're telling me people are going to be mean? This doesn't sound like something to sign up for." One thing is for sure – our Gospel text prevents us from saying, "Jesus didn't tell me." He doesn't say believing in Him will give us earthly riches or better health or more fulfilling relationships. In fact, He tells us that being His disciple will create hardships in the most important parts of our lives.

Why? It's related back to piece #1 – Jesus comes before everyone and everything else in our lives. That includes sinful family members and we ourselves, chief of sinners and that creates an inherent conflict, especially with people who do not believe, who do not identify themselves first with Jesus and live for Him.

How can this be? Isn't Jesus the Prince of Peace? Jesus builds peace by bringing people together in a relationship with Him. He does not compromise on peace, He does not give imitation peace, cheap peace.

Being a disciple of Christ will put us in challenging places in our relationships. For the unmarried, it means not being yoked to an unbeliever. For relatives who deny Christ, limiting exposure of your children to their beliefs against God. For loved ones in relationships that involve pre-marital sexual activity, cohabitation, adultery against their spouse or relationships with members of the same sex, holding to what God's Word has to say, no matter how widely accepted and normalized things become. For employees, maintaining integrity in the face of employers pressuring us to sin. For families, it means that sports activities, music and family trips do not get in the way of gathering with the body of Christ.

Jesus comes first. General Norman Schwarzkopf was right when he said, "The truth of the matter is that you always know the right thing to do. The hard part is doing it." Perhaps that's what Jesus is talking about when He says, "Whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me." Jesus isn't calling us to invent ways to make people angry at us, poking the bear for the sake of making a point. Too often Christians do this, getting their message off focus on side issues and leaving the Gospel in the dust. We don't choose our cross to bear. True cross-bearing is suffering for the sake of the Gospel message that Jesus is Lord. In the Gospel texts about Jesus' crucifixion we see a man named Simon help Jesus carry His cross when Jesus just couldn't physically do it anymore. But Simon of Cyrene did not volunteer to carry Jesus' cross. Roman soldiers with swords forced him to, or else.

This second part of the package, expecting opposition and hostility, bearing the cross is never of our choosing, it is borne of circumstances that come our way and lead us to speak the truth of Jesus, and it will bring us to our knees.

Piece #3 to our all-inclusive discipleship bundle is the first of the four items someone might actually want al la carte – Jesus and His Father are with us always and fill us with their power. Jesus says, “Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.” Isn’t that how we become disciples of Jesus in the first place? We received Him. Many of us in baptism. Others by hearing God’s Word – Christian friends who went out to the lost sheep of Israel as disciples. You trusted their message (which was God’s message) and received Jesus, too. That second piece to the package, the opposition and hostility bit is hard but we don’t do it alone – in fact, it’s not even our message.

Think God is unimpressed with you? Are you thinking of all the times you’ve shied away from standing on the truth, the times you’ve put things ahead of Jesus? You have received Jesus, and He forgives you. It’s a concrete promise made to you in baptism and in His Word. He brings peace between you and him and makes you His disciple and ever act done in love for Him becomes great in His sight. It is these things that give us strength to face the hurts and challenges of being opposed and rejected in the world and find joy in serving God today. Your prayers for other people, your showing His love in serving – funeral luncheons and food trucks and making snacks for Sunday School or VBS – these are done for the sake of the Gospel being preached – to share Jesus with others and to help others who are already bearing their own crosses in life. Jesus also strengthens us with each other. Jesus says, “And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.”

That reward is **Piece #4 to the bundle** – new life. While Jesus has not come to bring peace to the earth, He does come to bring peace to God’s people. It is the piece most people would want a la carte, and let’s just forget about that all-inclusive package, that bundle of total

commitment to Christ, opposition and hostility. Yet hope and joy for today and eternal life is found in Christ. He puts us in mission and exposes us to opposition and hostility because He so loves the whole world. There are others out there who need to hear the news so they do can have eternal life. And there are Christians, beaten, downtrodden, hurting from the challenges they face who need God working through us to encourage them.

This package is already yours. Jesus is living in you – you are His disciples. He already died for you. He has risen from death, He has come to you in baptism and works in your life now, even in the face of opposition, hostility and rejection. Ultimately, it is not we ourselves who are put on the line – it is Jesus and we are bundled in a package deal with Him. Whether we are rejected or received with open arms, we are disciples of He who is with us always and rewards us with eternal life. In Jesus' name, Amen.