Today is the last day of 2017. As we wrap up one year and prepare to start another, many people like to reflect on the previous 12 months. What were the highlights, low points, best memories?

Lately, your elders have been doing something similar – with disciple making. “Are we really making disciples?”

Radiant Juneau: Family of servant missionaries learning to be and make disciples – followers of Jesus

We don’t want to emphasize GC’s or gather for a worship service just to be doing something; we want to make disciples.

As I look back, I see that we do a pretty good job of issuing a call to follow Jesus, but we’re not so good at making disciples who make disciples – what Jesus models for us in the Gospels.

The call is the easy part – disciple making, truly following, is the hard part

* Follow Jesus - to accompany him, to learn from him, and to respond to his voice.
* Our lives often take turns that we don’t expect

This morning, Jesus tells us that following him (disciple) comes at a great cost.

Mark 8:34-37

I’m sure most of you have heard this passage before - all 4 gospels contain at least part of this.

As Jesus discusses the costs of discipleship, he gives us three imperatives, 3 commands.

1. Deny Self
   * Not the same as self-denial (fasting)
     + Denying self = surrender to Christ and determine to obey His will.
     + Not just part of ourselves, but our entire being
     + Not of desperation, but of devotion - personal devotion should lead to changed actions, attitudes, desires
2. Take up your cross - Identify with Jesus in suffering and death

* Here, Jesus was hinting at his death and confronting Peter who only moments earlier in Vs. 32 rebuked Jesus for saying that he would suffer and be killed.
  + Irony - Jesus connects Peter’s denial of suffering Messiahship, but also makes suffering, self-denial, and cross-bearing a necessary way for Peter and the disciples.
  + Does not mean we try to be a martyr or intentionally suffer, but we serve a God who came to earth to suffer and died, can we really expect anything greater than that?
* Carrying cross = brought to mind the sight of a condemned man who was forced to demonstrate submission to Rome by carrying part of the cross through the city to the place of execution
* Was a symbol of disgrace, humiliation, and offensive
  + By carrying the cross, one publicly demonstrated submission/obedience to the authority against which he had previously rebelled.
  + Not brought up in polite conversation
  + They would no more wear a cross around their neck than we would a gold electric chair.

Jesus calls his followers to carry their cross.

* not bearing life’s troubles - “it’s my cross to bear” – Joke in my house
* It is declaring that you are determined to follow Jesus no matter the consequences.

The cross is not pleasant to think about, so many churches underemphasize it.

Martin Luther: “No theology is genuinely Christian which does not arise from and focus on the cross.”

1. Continue to follow

* In Greek, this is the most emphasized part of the sentence.
  + Present active imperative - continual effort
  + Luke (pick up cross DAILY)
  + Daily discipline - one day at a time
* Follow obediently wherever he leads.
  + Sometimes this is pleasant, but other times He leads us to where we don’t necessarily want to go.

Love- Jesus is honest with us about the cost of discipleship

* Doesn’t bribe us with the offer of an easy life - no bait and switch
* Doesn’t call us to do anything he was not prepared to do himself.
  + Essence of a true leader.
  + Army - don’t ask your soldiers to do anything you won’t do yourself

Dislike - It forces me to change

* The world tells us to avoid anything that bothers us or becomes difficult - you are perfect the way you are.
* Forces me to give up control
  + Independence, pride, the idea of an easy life

This is one of the major reasons why the cross is so offensive - goes against the “American dream”

In a world where everything revolves around self - protect yourself, promote yourself, preserve yourself, entertain yourself, comfort yourself, take care of yourself - Jesus says “slay yourself”

* Peter crucified upside down
* Andrew crucified in Greece
* James - beheaded
* James (Jesus’ bro) - the leader of the Church in Jerusalem and brother of Jesus, was thrown down more than a hundred feet from the southeast pinnacle of the Temple when he refused to deny his faith in Christ. When they discovered that he survived the fall, his enemies beat James to death with a club.
* Matthias (replaced Judas) - stoned and beheaded
* John - boiled in oil, after surviving exiled to Patmos

Martin Luther - “A religion that gives nothing, costs nothing, and suffers nothing, is worth nothing.”

Over the next year, we will be focusing more and more on disciple making – truly following Jesus no matter the cost. Your elders want to be better disciples and want to help you do the same – don’t just want to gather and feel good about ourselves

* That cheapens the cross – cheap grace

# Dietrich Bonhoeffer – “Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession...Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.”

Jesus didn’t die so that we could hang out together, be comfortable and feel good about ourselves – died so that we could be right before God and lead others to him – be disciples who make disciples – anything less is cheap grace

Communion – we remember the cost of grace each week