

Plymouth Congregational Church of Fort Wayne, UCC
September 4, 2016

“Warning to Would-Be Disciples”

**“... In just that way, only those who say goodbye
to all their possessions can be my disciple.”**

Luke 14:33

Prelude

In preparation for this morning,
I encountered two terms that were
somewhat new to me.

On various college campuses across the country
there is a growing movement to protect the
emotional well-being of students from ideas,
thoughts, concepts they either don't like,
or they aren't emotionally equipped to handle.

A term has emerged - **“microaggressions”** -
to describe small actions or words that create
offense, that wound or aggrieve a student, or
a segment of the student body.

A second term - **“trigger warnings”** - are
teacher alerts, professorial cautions that
preface course material indicating subject
matter may cause discomfort or stir a
strong emotional response.

These two terms -
microaggressions and trigger warnings
appeared a year ago in an *Atlantic Monthly*
article (Sept. 2015 by Greg Lukianoff and
Jonathan Haidt) entitled: **“The Coddling of
the American Mind.”**

It was mentioned in a *Christian Century* this past month by professor Leanna Fuller, who commented,

“The practice of alerting students ... giving them a ‘trigger warning’ has become widespread” (*Christian Century*, Aug. 2016, p. 23).

This comment was in an article entitled: **“When Learning Hurts.”**

In a coffee conversation just yesterday with a professor I asked: “Are you familiar with the term “trigger warning.” He said: **“Oh yes, it is standard pedagogical practice in the classroom.”**

You may have noticed, students entering the University of Chicago this fall, the class of 2020, received a letter of welcome from the Dean of Students which clearly stated the university - dedicated to the freedom of inquiry and expression - does not support practice of issuing **“trigger warnings.”**

The dean went on to say:

“We do not condone the creation of intellectual ‘safe spaces’ where individuals can retreat from ideas and perspectives at odds with their own.”

This great debate - to warn or not to warn - to create neutral zones, safe spaces, reminds me of a line from the musical, 1776 - an exasperated John Adams, frustrated for lack of initiative, exclaiming: **“This is a revolution, dammit! We are going to have to offend ... We are going to have to offend SOMEbody ...”**

Why mention this? Our lesson this morning merits a **“trigger warning.”**

If you listen, be careful. Please, don't mute the message with a quick click of your mental remote.

Our lesson does not entertain a Jesus meek, mild, and irresistibly magnetic.

Jesus has called a time out;
he speaks sternly.

It gives us pause, doesn't it?

Luke, the compositional hand at play
in this gospel text,
upfronts a demanding Jesus who has
high expectations, strict standards,
for aspiring disciples.

**“Whoever comes to me and does not
hate father and mother, wife and children,
brother and sisters, yes, and even life itself,
cannot be my disciple.”**

Luke 14:26

**“Whoever does not carry the cross
and follow me cannot be my disciple.”**

Luke 14:27

Is this the Jesus we signed up to follow?

Explaining this manner of speech as
hyperbole, exaggeration, does not soften
its blow and make it more palatable.

Jesus solicits followers. He is a recruiter
for the kingdom of God, a realm that
radically departs from a world full of
spite and misery.

Nothing is hidden in fine print.
When you sign up to walk with Jesus
there are certain conditions to be met;
one must turn from those things that
forestall, enthrall, or divide your heart.

If you are a builder, you count the cost
to complete your project (Luke 14:28-30);
if you are a warrior, you count the cost
in waging war, to ensure victory (Luke
14:31-32).

So for followers of Jesus,
those who have said “goodbye” to a past,
in order to embrace the present where
Jesus reigns uncontested.

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Our lives are defined both
by our yes's and no's; what
we have renounced,
and what we have embraced.

It is not enough to just say no,
as important as that may be in some instances.
What we negate is only half of the equation
of the whole life God desires. We also need to
determine what we affirm, what we embrace,
the “**what we hold most near and dear.**”

It may help to understand this passage
to look into its larger context. Just prior
to this passage, Jesus was present at a
house party hosted by a Pharisee.
Conversation at this party grew a little
strained, and Jesus became a little irritated.
Jesus had challenged the host to expand
his guest list, to reach beyond the social

circle that defined his life. **“When you give a banquet invite those can’t repay the favor: the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind.”** Such generosity will prove to be a blessing, not to the guests, but to the benefactor of the banquet.

One of the dinner guests was inspired by this, and gave an enthusiastic shout out: **“Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God.”** This prompted Jesus to tell a parable. Someone gave a great dinner and invited a lot of people.

The invitees, though, did not show up. They offered excuses accounting for their absences.

One said, **“I just bought a piece of property, and I’ve got to go and see it; please accept my regrets.”**

Another said, **“I have just acquired five yoke of oxen, and I need to try them out; please accept my regrets.”**

Another said, **“I just got married, and I cannot come.”** This came with no regrets.

In the parable, the banquet hall appears empty. Everyone on the guest list has more important matters that require attention. So the host sends his staff into the streets and alleys of the city, to bring in the tired and poor, all others who are overlooked, who are assumed to be people of no consequence, a people who don’t count, because they really don’t matter.

This is background to Luke's lesson for us today. Jesus seeing large crowds following – and posing this question – do you know all that is expected of those who follow me?

Jesus wants us to say goodbye to whatever divides our hearts and minds.

One scholar offering comment on this passage stated: **“Following Jesus is no invitation to an ice-cream social”** (Fred Danker, p. 167, *Jesus and the New Age*). It comes with risk, the facing of danger, renouncing ways of the world that conflict with God's extravagant grace and mercy.

We are not adept at making this clear in the church. A failure to attain clarity on this leads the church, according to the same scholar, **“to pussy-foot on issues of race and prejudice and economic exploitation.”** Church isn't a club for the likeminded. We are a community charged to love and serve with a love like that of Jesus. In the following of Jesus our self-centered lives get readjusted; we align ourselves with the love that is looking out ... looking out for opportunities to share what goodness and mercy God has shared with us.

Sometimes we do;
often we don't.
And sometimes we are made aware
that we haven't extended ourselves
to the degree that God desires.

The poet Marguerite Wilkinson (1883-1928),
once wrote:

“I never cut my neighbor's throat;

**My neighbor's gold I never stole;
I never spoiled his house and land;
But God have mercy on my soul!"**

**"For I am haunted night and day
By all the deeds I have not done;
O unattempted loveliness!
O costly valor never won!"**

This is what we as Christians understand:
Jesus comes to break our haunted
 nights and days,
calling us with expectation that we will
be eager and willing to attempt loveliness;
and so this is what we pray:
for wisdom and courage to step
outside of this sanctuary -
to share gospel with the world
 wherever,
 with whomever
it is needed. And we do this,
not to save some other poor soul,
but our own, and to glorify the God
whose grace has brought us to life
 the Jesus way.

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Josiah Royce (1855-1916)
**"Unless you can find some sort of loyalty,
you cannot find unity and peace in
your active living."**

Amen.

*(Sermons are typically composed in haste,
for the demands of the day are many;
so be charitable as you read; and remember:
the contents of this sermon have not been edited
and may or may not have been a part of its public presentation)*