

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin R. Eden

The Fourth Sunday of Easter
Saturday, April 24, 2010 at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, April 25, 2010 at 8:00 a.m. & 10:15 a.m.

“The Cost of Discipleship”

John 10:22-30

Christ is Risen!! He is Risen indeed!! Alleluia!!

It has been said that modern Americans “work at their play, worship their work, and play at their worship.” We work at our play. Think of how much time and money someone will devote to “working on their golf game.” We always need a day to recuperate from our vacations. Think of the rigorous, and stressful schedules we create so that our children can kick a ball in a grassy field, or hit, throw, and catch a baseball with their friends; or learn to do cartwheels and somersaults. That which is meant to allow us to escape from stress, we manage to turn into work.

We worship our work. Having a 50 or 60 hour work week is something we wear like a badge of honor. We define ourselves by what we do to earn a paycheck. How we are truly defined is in our relationship with our Father in heaven. Only in knowing Him do we have anything to boast about.

And finally modern Americans “play at their worship”. There are many places which are called the house of God which are primarily concerned with everything being cute and fun. Joel Osteen stated that when you come to his church, he wants it to feel like Disney World.

There are numerous reasons why coming to God’s house is fun. With the celebration of the resurrection of our Lord we had here on Easter

morning, I don't recall ever having more fun or being filled with more joy – because of what God has done for me.

It use to be that a person's life revolved around their life in the church. The family set their schedule according to the goings-on at the church. The community set its schedule according to the happenings at the church. Going back to the days of the apostles, Luke records that the faithful “devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer...Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts” [Acts 2:42, 46].

In the last generation or so, God's House has ceased to be the center of our family and community. Sunday is no longer a day set aside by businesses allowing workers to worship. Someone, actually, once said to me that they didn't come to church because they needed some good *family* time -- on Sunday morning.

Two Sundays ago, we along with most every church in the Western world suffered a significant drop in attendance because it was the Sunday after Easter. After all, who really can come to church two or three weeks in a row?

Even among the so-called religious leaders of our day, there is a strong push to limit the time spent in church. Lyle Shaller, an advocate of the church growth movement and one of the most popular Christian writers today, says that it will be the death of a church if the worship service lasts for more than an hour. People will not sacrifice that much time out of their schedule.

Is it such a sacrifice? Is it such a burden to come here and give thanks to God for an hour and 10 minutes? Well, maybe it is; after all, what has God ever done for us?

When God's House ceases to be the center of our family and community, it is because God has ceased to be the center of our life. We live in a hostile culture. We are a sparse flock of sheep in a land of ravenous wolves. Which is all the more reason to stay focused and have our lives centered around Christ and His church.

The danger is that we lose the concept of what it means to sacrifice of ourselves. Sure, most people want to be members *of* a church, but we are called to willingly give up the ownership of our self and belong *to* Christ and His church.

As Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German Lutheran who in WWII died in a concentration camp -- as he wrote, there is a cost to discipleship. Being a disciple of Christ means humbling yourself. It goes beyond just giving up certain sinful activities. Life in the church is not just "Pray, pay, and obey." Discipleship means focusing our lives on the will of God.

We do not need to leave the world to be a good disciple. Like the early disciples, we are to devote ourselves "to the apostle's teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." Through the ministry of Word and Sacrament, we hear the Good Shepherd's voice. As long as we can hear His voice, we know that we have not wandered off into the territory of ravenous wolves.

If a person follows the secular world and decides that worshiping together, hearing God's Word, belonging to Christ are not that important,

then that person will not hear the Good Shepherd's voice and will inevitably wander off into dangerous territory.

Our Shepherd says, "Take up your cross and follow Me." There is a cost to being a part of the Kingdom of God. We are humbled by the great gift of salvation we have been given. Our Shepherd holds our lives in His hand. We belong to Him, and to His church on earth -- looking forward to the Church Triumphant.

On this Good Shepherd Sunday, we stand in awe at how much God has done for us and how no amount of worship or praise is sufficient to properly thank Him. We are but helpless sheep whose sole solace, comfort, and strength in this life is to hear the voice of our Good Shepherd.

He does hold our lives in His hand, and because He lowered Himself and humbled Himself to become one of us and be that final Lamb of sacrifice, He has given us eternal life and we will never perish.

That is the joy of this Easter Season. Our life in Christ brings forth life eternal. We gather this morning and join the saints and angels in response to our Lord and say as best our feeble lips can offer, "Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever!" Amen.

Christ is Risen!! He is Risen indeed!! Alleluia!!