

## Words for an Emerging Church

Wednesday, November 17, 2021

# “Nickeled and Dimed”

*Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. —Mark 8:34, 35*

According to the old expression a certain item which keeps causing us manageable but continual expense is said to be “nickeling and diming” us. We commonly use this expression regarding automobiles which keep visiting the shop for a wide variety of medium-priced maladies, and the repeated discomfort of the repair bills can add up to something most upsetting. This expression seems to suit the Covid crisis well as the past two years have been riddled with endless “small and reasonable” requests. It started with “Ten days to flatten the curve,” and then became requirements for masks, distancing, quarantine periods and visitation restrictions, business restrictions, and a host of other requirements. Each one of these requests is presented as a “small and reasonable” one, and in two years the disruption of it all has added up to something huge.

We have been dealing with major disruption and no small amount of resulting pains. Many businesses have been devastated. I am in touch with the barbering industry enough to know that the COVID restrictions still make it near impossible for some to make a living. The continued protocols still cause us all ongoing disruptions, like my granddaughter’s birthday party being semi-cancelled (it’s complicated), *Lunch with Luke* remaining on hold, the Christmas Bazaar needing an overhaul, reunions and gatherings being put off or poorly attended, and vacation and much of any future plans being in serious limbo. We now live with a pervading sense of uncertainty and awkwardness as all the “little” requests and requirements have added up to a big challenge.

This should not be a complete surprise as physicians have long been in the habit of making their requests sound small. “You just need to lose a few pounds.” “You really need to lessen your stress levels.” “Just eat less salt and fewer fats.” For a moment it may sound like a small thing to ask, but the implications of the demand are significant, and though the prescription is well intended it can lead to a feeling of resentment. No one likes to be “nickeled and dimed” for it has the feel of being bamboozled. I recall an acquaintance of some years ago who was always imposing himself in major ways

for major favors. The real aggravation of it all was that all the asking was done in the vocabulary of “All I’m asking is...,” “I just have one little request ....” His was a “nickel and dime” strategy and it was most annoying.

The COVID crisis has had a definite “nickel and dime” feel to it, which I believe explains much of the resistance and social unrest in these days. Please know that **I do not say this to invalidate the restrictions and concerns with which we have been saddled.** What I do believe is that in light of this dynamic our medical and political leaders could exercise a lot more candor regarding the full weight of the requirements which they are imposing and more sympathy for those who are being imposed upon!

Jesus was always very straightforward regarding the demands he placed upon his followers. As people of this world, we have all learned to minimize the message of cost for fear that we may frighten or offend, but Jesus felt no such compulsion. *Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.* At first, we find this request shocking. Jesus wants us to give everything, for if we are to experience victory over sin and death, major commitment is necessary. Our Lord offered no such messages as “All I ask is that you show up to Church, and that you just give an offering, and that you....” To be a follower of Jesus demands radical action and the Savior is refreshingly blunt on this point.

Big battles, whether against dangerous viruses or against sin and death, require big responses. How glad we can be to follow One who speaks so honestly regarding those demands.

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

*My God, I am not my own but yours.  
Take me for your own,  
and help me in all things to do your holy will.  
My God, I give myself to you,  
in joy and sorrow,  
in sickness and in health,  
in success and failure,  
in life and in death,  
in time and for eternity.  
Make me and keep me your own;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. —Source unknown*