

Benedict (10 July 2013)
Abbot of Monte Cassino, c. 540
Psalm 1
Proverbs 2:1-9
Luke 14:27-33

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Today the church remembers Benedict, Abbot of Monte Cassino and the father of western monasticism. He was born around 480 in Italy, composed in his monastic Rule in 540, and died shortly thereafter. An average day under his Rule provided for four hours of prayer, five hours of reading, six hours of work, one hour for eating, and eight hours of sleep. Benedictines recite the entire Psalter once every week – during the Daily Office at Calvary, we recite the Psalter at the less pious pace of once every month.

Through history the monastery at Monte Cassino has been a place of peace and hospitality. But more recently, that has not been the case. During WWII, it was the sight of much bloodshed. Situated on a hill and feared as a key lookout for the German defenses, American bombers destroyed the monastery in February 1944. Not a single German soldier was killed because, while the monks provided shelter to Italian refugees, German troops agreed to not occupy the monastery. Four battles followed at Monte Cassino with 105,000 Allied and 20,000 German casualties.

Western monasticism grew out of the early church's experience as martyrs and desert mystics and hermits. Desert monastics, and the Western monastics that followed, did not flee to the desert or monastery to escape their neighbor. Rather in the desert and under the Rule, they were able to more fully grasp what the neighbor is. Monastics found their life by modeling their submission to God by submitting to their abbot and living out the radical hospitality of Jesus by welcoming the stranger and traveller. Monasticism still plays an important function for the church and the wider world as it questions the priorities of our communities.

Although Benedictine monasticism will likely not be recreated here at Calvary Church, the Rule of Benedict and our Gospel text for today can spark our imaginations to think about how we are and how we will become a people who faithfully participate in the communion of saints and live lives worthy the Gospel.

The Gospel reading from Luke asks us to question the cost of discipleship. Jesus begins by saying, "Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." While the cross has yet to be explained in Luke's narrative, we have learned from our recent Sunday lectionary readings that Jesus has his eyes and mission set on Jerusalem, and he is not looking back from the plow (Luke 9:62). Jesus also says that "whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple." To be a disciple is to renounce all that we have. Both of these teachings are difficult, and I think we should

understand them as they are – difficult. Jesus’ description of a disciple has a great cost and the option to be a casual disciple is not available.

A defining characteristic of discipleship, according to Jesus, is giving up all of our possessions. We would be off the hook too easily if we were to think about the *potentiality* giving up all our possessions – renouncing all that we have is statement of fact for disciples of Jesus. To explain the cost of discipleship, Jesus tells two parables. First, the story of one who builds a tower, and estimates the cost before building. Next, a king, whose soldiers are outnumbered, deliberates if he can be successful in battle, and if not will ask for peace while the enemy is far off. In both cases, Jesus describes powerful and influential people. One who is able to build a tower, another who is a king. Both have much to gain or lose if they do not count the cost properly. And both are at risk of losing *all* of their resources. Jesus’ parables give no detail on *how* one will build the tower or how the king would win the battle. Rather the parables focus on *whether* it can be done – *whether* one can renounce all he has.

The gospel of Luke is full of examples of how the kingdom of God flips our understanding of things. We read in the *Magnificat*, which we recite each day during Evening Prayer, that God puts down the mighty and exalts the humble and meek, the hungry are filled with good things and the rich go away empty. Just before today’s passage, Jesus describes a wedding banquet where the guests “who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” (Luke 14:10).

When we commemorate Benedict today, we remember his humility to the neighbor and stranger and that he “delighted in the law of the Lord” (Psalm 1:2). Benedict reminds us that those who have released their grip on their possessions and embraced their neighbor are those who have counted the costs of discipleship and given everything up for the sake of Jesus.

AMEN.