

“Are You Engaged? II” based on Luke 14:25-33 9/5/10

During the years when “Star Trek: The Next Generation” was newly popular as a science fiction TV series, we got to see stories with amazing plots, unique makeup and costuming, and technology that was beyond what generally existed in the real world. But what always caught my attention was the way in which Captain Jean Luc Picard gave the command for his spaceship “The Enterprise” to move out. It was a single word that he used, which he spoke with unmistakable boldness and confidence: “**Engage.**”

“Engage” is an interesting word for a spaceship commander to use, because it’s more than just the idea of taking off, more than just leaving the present position. Rather it indicates that there is something ahead out there for the captain and crew, that’s calling for their involvement, something that needs to be known and experienced--and not something that would necessarily be simple and safe, but something that would be an adventure—that would be challenging and even risky.

For the word “engage” has to do with something drawing us in, and calling forth our efforts. For a man and woman about to be married, their engagement signifies a strong commitment to each other, focused personal involvement, and a pledge to move forward to the wedding day. And if we’re speaking of soldiers engaged in war, we know that their whole being is committed to take the enemy in hand and win the battle. And if we are speaking mechanically, we are reminded that gears cannot accomplish their intended purpose unless they interlock, or engage, each other.

So how does all of this relate to today’s Gospel lesson from Luke 14? Well, in today’s lesson, Jesus is saying to those who would follow him: “Engage, engage passionately, engage thoughtfully, engage for the long haul, and disengage from all of the things that don’t let you engage, in following me.”

Life is about engagement. Every day we get up and engage a new day. Some days we may feel more excited about doing that than others, but all of us realize that life is made for living and living involves us in the activities, relationships, joys and concerns that come into each day. And since our life is not just a material journey but a spiritual journey, we engage the life that we have in a way that recognizes Jesus as the Lord of our life. We have come to know that we have been created, saved and commissioned to be his witnesses, expressing his love and light in the world. We don’t just belong to ourselves, to do whatever we want, but we are called to believe in and follow the One who gave his life for us. So our Lord calls us to **engage** our life with him—to commit to being his disciples. “**Come, follow me.**” Jesus says. And we have and we are.

“**But, there’s a bit more to it,**” Jesus says. Engage your life with me passionately. Not half-heartedly, not haphazardly, but passionately. In the book of **Revelation**, John, the author, writes a letter to each of 7 churches in Asia Minor. And to the one in Laodicea he writes: “**I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot!**” Jesus doesn’t desire lukewarm followers, but passionate followers—followers who will put forth their first and best efforts to follow his lead—to love him with all their heart, mind, soul and strength and with all that they have and are. “**And,**” Jesus says, “**even as you love your family and those around you, which is what I want you to do, love me even more.**”

But along with our passionate engagement, Jesus calls for our thoughtful engagement. He says: Recognize that following me is the best life there is. But also recognize that it is a life that will likely include sacrifice. It may be the sacrifice of

avoiding certain things that don't honor God. It may mean doing what you know is right and not following the crowd, which may leave you feeling lonely and alone. It may mean practicing patience when others are not, or exercising tough love at the risk of offending others. **"Take time to count the cost,"** Jesus says. Think ahead--just like a builder who first creates a plan for building before he begins. And be like the general, who would have a battle plan before he sends his troops out to engage the enemy. And recognize that there may be those who will be indifferent and even hostile toward you as you live the way of Christ. As the author of *I Peter* states in chapter 4:12: **"Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed."**

Yet, there is even more to it than that. Being a disciple of Jesus Christ is a marathon, not a sprint. Sometimes we may wish it were just a sprint. But it's really a journey that began when we made our Confirmation vows, claiming for ourselves our willingness to make Jesus the Lord of our life. And this journey lasts our whole life long, and we want to go the distance. A Christian author, who wrote a book about leadership, entitled one of the chapters: "Finishing Well." When we run the race of following our Savior Jesus Christ, we want to make it all the way to the finish line, completing the race in a way that is God-honoring and brings a blessing to those our life has touched. As the Apostle Paul writes in his letter to the *Philippian Christians*, about his own spiritual journey: **"The one thing I do, is to forget what is behind me and do my best to reach what is ahead. So I run straight toward the goal in order to win the prize, which is God's call through Christ Jesus to the life above."**

Finally, our Lord invites us to disengage from all the things that get in the way of following him and fully engaging our life with him. The writer of *Hebrews* affirms this in a Scripture that we heard just a few weeks ago: **"So then, let us rid ourselves of everything that gets in the way, and the sin which holds on to us so tightly, and let us run with determination the race that lies before us. Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus on whom our faith depends from beginning to end. He didn't give up because of the cross! On the contrary, because of the joy that was waiting for him, he thought nothing of the disgrace of dying on the cross, and he is now seated at the right side of God's throne."**

Jesus' words today lay it on the line for all of us: Following him is a demanding thing. It's a passionate thing, a thoughtful thing. It's a determined thing and a focused thing. And ultimately, it's the best thing, because Jesus is the best Good News this world has even known. And he says to us, **"If you would follow me, come with all you have, and all that you are."** Amen.