

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Cycle A, 2017
Church of St. Joan of Arc, Marlton NJ
[Matthew 10:37-42; Romans 6:8-11]

Where Do You Put Your John Hancock?

Cursive is an art form dying a quick death.

Maybe one of the only times cursive is now used is when we sign our name.

When you put your name on something, it means something.

If you don't sign the check you give us, we can't cash it. (a lot of us don't even use checks today, I know).

You still have to sign a contract, or a loan, a mortgage. When you buy a car you sign about 500 papers.

Engaged couples I meet have to sign a statement before getting married, a statement that says they are marrying freely, without any pressure, with the intention to be

faithful, to make it permanent and to be open to children.

When you put your name on something, it means something.

In 1776 when our founding fathers put their names on the Declaration of Independence, you can bet it meant something.

Benjamin Franklin said it best: "Gentlemen, we must, indeed, all hang together or, most assuredly, we shall all hang separately."

They knew that signing that Declaration was like signing a death sentence. Signing it said, "I am all in this. I am risking everything for this cause and purpose, the forming of a new nation."

In a sense, by signing it, the Founders put this nation above everything, above their family, above their fortunes, above their own futures and their happiness, above their very lives.

I think that is what Jesus is getting at in today's Gospel.

At this point in his ministry, he is asking his disciples, so to speak, to sign their name, to stake their lives on the Kingdom of God.

“Are you all in?” he is asking them.

And us. Am I all in? Are you all in?

Can I say, with St. Paul, that I “live for God in Christ Jesus”? Do I put following Jesus above everything else in my life – above my fortune, above *even my happiness*?

Personal happiness is almost the gold standard these days – it’s the most important thing. When Jefferson wrote we have the right to pursue happiness, did he mean personal happiness should be put above everything?

Years ago I told my parents I wanted to be a priest, they like any parent, I suppose, said, “We want you to be happy.” I understand what they meant – they wanted me to do something with my life that brought fulfillment and satisfaction and meaning – but is being happy the highest

value? Maybe we should tell our children we want them to have a life of purpose, meaning, a life that is good, loving. Maybe we should tell our children we want, most of all, for them to know and follow Jesus.

Following Jesus means taking up his cross. It means putting Him above all.

Jesus certainly doesn’t want us to hate our parents or our families. He does want us to put Him and His kingdom in the center of our lives.

And to be willing to go public about it.

Remember: this was radical for Jews – they didn’t seek converts. They welcomed them, but they didn’t actively go out to bring people into the fold. Christians are called to share the faith, to be a witness for Christ, to help others hear the Good News.

So, if Jesus were to put a document in front of me, in front of you that read: “Follow me. At all costs. Put me first in everything you do. And let people know about it.”

Would we sign it? Would it be a firm signature or a shaky one? Would I make my signature as big and bold as John Hancock's? The story goes he did it so the King of England, his new sworn enemy, would be sure to see it.

Can we so boldly sign on to follow Jesus?