

When is the last time you made a commitment to something? How has that gone for you? Quite often these days, commitments and promises are made without much thinking at all. When I do baptisms and I go through that whole long list of things that parents promise to do and I wonder if some of those things will really happen, or have they even heard what I said. The same goes for the sponsors. And then, the same goes for us, the members of the church. We make the promise as the people of God, to support the child and pray for the child in its new life in Christ. Do we? Do we even pray for this child even once after we leave the service? We said we would.

This is what Jesus is seeking in our gospel text for today. He is calling us to hear the gospel message, all of it, and he is asking us if we are ready to live into this calling, not a little, not a lot, but completely. Jesus isn't looking for people who act no better than spectators in the stands. He wants people, as Brene Brown would say, in the arena with him. Jesus is asking us if we are ready to jump in completely into this arena, or when you start to see and hear things you don't like, you're either going to whine or leave?

I am wearing a cross and it reminds me of how difficult it is to be a Christian. This cross should not be seen as something that brings health, or brings unity back to broken relationships or things like that. The cross, even though it does mean these things too, is a symbol that says we are in the arena. When sacrifices must be made, we make them. When people treat people poorly, when injustices are done and people are marginalized or dehumanized, we don't shrink away from Jesus' teachings and do nothing. No, we're in the arena. Our life in Christ isn't a show. It's not something we just watch. This life in Christ calls us into the arena to do, to act, to make a difference.

I cringe when people make promises. We never know if we can keep our promises and Jesus isn't asking us for absolute following on what we've promised. He is, nevertheless, asking us to look at the promises we made at baptisms, at our affirmation of baptisms. He is asking us if we love God above all else. Do we love ourselves, and then do we love our neighbors as ourselves. Jesus, as I said before, is asking us, are we in the arena or not.

This quote by Teddy Roosevelt is said so often: "It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat." May these thoughts vibrate our souls into what it takes to live as a Christian. May we live the arena, the Kingdom of God. May we strive to be the people God created us to be. May our bodies and faces be marred with the dust, sweat and blood that comes with proclaiming the love of God to all people. We won't always win, but may we lift high the cross of Jesus. May we lift high the love that God proclaims to all. May we act the way Jesus teaches us. Let's get into the arena. Let's lift high the cross. Let's bring unity where the world has caused division. Let us strive to live into the promises we made at our baptisms, to live among God's faithful people, to hear the word of God and share in the Lord's supper, to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, to serve all people, following the example of Jesus, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth? The call is yours. Hop into the arena. Amen