

So by now I'm pretty sure you all are fairly well aware of my ardent dislike of early morning wakeups. I am not a bright eyed and bushy tailed morning person, it's just not my thing. The sun needs to be well up and I need at least half a cup of coffee in me before I am anything close to bright eyed. So with that in mind, I want you to imagine my teenage self, who was an even worse morning person than my adult self, getting in my mom's car well before six in the morning to go stand in line at our local flower shop that was around the corner from our house to stand in line for several hours. Now you're probably asking yourself, why, why Pastor Tina would you and your mother be standing in line at a *flower shop* before six in the morning waiting for it to open? Well, it was the late nineties and our local flower shop was one of places that sold...wait for it...Beanie Babies.

Yes indeed, my mom and I waited in line for the doors to open so we could see the new batch of Beanie Babies that got delivered. We would do this at multiple places. We had a Beanie Baby *dealer*. It was a woman my mom met at the place she got her nails done and we would go to her house and look through her collection finding her "rare" ones and the ones that were on the brink of retirement and we would be in awe at the possibility that she would be willing to sell. My goodness when the Princess Diana bear came out, we were in line. When McDonald's put mini bears in the

Happy Meals, I ate more fast food than I had in years. We were obsessed. And honestly, I look back at those years and I laugh because my word were we something else, convinced that someday these things would be worth money, but only if we would be willing to part with them, and also I'm filled with such joy because those moments were some of my favorites with my mom when I was a teenager. The never-ending hunt for that elusive next Beanie, wondering what we would find at the next delivery.

Now, if you look on my desk or you wander into my house, you will still see the remnants of this time of my life. There is a Beanie Baby on my desk, still with its tag protector on because you *could not harm the tag!!* And there are Beanies on my bookshelves at home, high up enough that the dog cannot get them and think ooo new toy! But the majority of them have been resigned to the oblivion that is my mom's attic, tucked into storage bins because what in the world do you do with a crab filled with beans?! Because all that money they were worth? Uh huh, dime a dozen on eBay so it isn't even worth the effort. They just sit there now, and I need to go through them and do something with them, but for now, well they simple sit as a marker of a time long ago when I was willing to get up early for something entirely ridiculous.

I am sure all of you have similar stories. If it wasn't Beanie Babies, it was Cabbage Patch dolls, and believe me my mom has stories about those too, but from when Kristin was little, not me. If it wasn't those it was Tickle Me Elmo or a Barbie or a Furby or a Hatchimal or Rubix Cube or any number of things that from time immemorial we have lined up for because we *needed* the next hottest thing to hit store shelves just in time for Christmas. There's a reason why Twitter has a section for what's "trending" and for it to be a big deal when something hits that top ten list. We are a culture obsessed with the next best thing. And it isn't just toys. Think of the lines when the latest iPhone drops or the newest gaming system. Think of the wait lists we have heard about to get a Tesla. Think of how quickly you have to try and watch new shows when they drop to avoid spoilers because every has to watch the next best thing. We are a people that are all about the trend, and we will chase them, all the while knowing that give it a few years, a few months, sometimes even a few hours, and we'll be moving on to something else bigger, brighter, better, more interesting.

In typical Jesus fashion, he knows how humanity operates long before the word "viral" meant anything related either being sick or being trendy, which is what brings us to our gospel this morning. And I'll be honest, our gospel feels a little weird and kind of disjointed. It feels a bit like Luke sat

down with all of his notes and he was like...huh, I have all these things I still want to include, but they don't really *fit* anywhere, so we're just going to mash them all together and tuck them in between a few parables and maybe no one will notice or care that they seem out of place. I mean, we have Jesus yet again talking about difficult family relationships, then telling kind of like a parable about building and going to war, and then there's some stuff about the cross, and then oh just for good measure, sell all of your stuff. It's a whiplash kind of gospel. You think you have your head wrapped around one part and then it's like nope, onto the next thing! It's weird, but just because it's weird doesn't mean it doesn't have a lot to say to us today.

I think one of the keys here is remembering that Jesus isn't talking to the disciples here, but turns and directly addresses the large crowds that are following behind him. Jesus knows that he is on the downward trajectory of his ministry, the ball rolling faster and faster towards Jerusalem, and as his time shortens, his popularity, his trendiness only seems to grow. Jesus has absolutely gone viral with his pithy sayings and his angst towards empire and his words for the oppressed and the lost and his miracles. People are flocking to him in droves, wanting a piece of the latest action to hit Galilee. He's popular, but as his popularity increases and Jerusalem grows nearer, Jesus needs the crowds to take stock of just what they're lining up for.

Jesus isn't interested in being a flash in the pan trend. He knows that he has come into the world to bring about the kingdom and in order to do that, to have it have a lasting, eternal impact, he is going to need followers who will pick up the mantle of the gospel once he is gone. But he also knows that not everyone in this crowd that surrounds him understands the depth, the breadth, the seriousness of what he is calling them to, what it truly means to follow him. So he lays it out. If you're going to follow me, it means halting your allegiance to everything else, even your family if it comes down to it. It means bearing the burdens of others and potentially enduring suffering at the hands of those who oppose the gospel. To follow Jesus means to have a little bit of a plan for the future. You can't just throw your hat in and go oh yeah we'll figure it out as it goes, and then watch as that plan and your faith get dusty as they've been resigned to the corner when the next big thing comes around. And it also means no longer putting your faith in your stuff, but in something greater and more profound than anything the physical world can offer.

Jesus is offering a stark wake up call to those who claim they are ready to follow. He wants them to know that he isn't really in this for casual, one-off people who are curious, who just want to gawk at the latest trend and then move on when something else pulls their attention. He's not

interested in those who hop on the bandwagon while it's cool but stay near the back so they can hop off when the ride gets a bit too bumpy or isn't what they expected it to be. They seem like stark, harsh words, and frankly it's what the crowd needs to hear because of they're serious about following Jesus they need to know what they're in for.

We like to think that we're vastly different from these early followers, that we have a more serious grip on our faith and what it means to take up our cross simply because we wear one around our neck everyday. Yet, more often than not, we have a tendency to resign our faith to the corner when there are other "more important," "more pressing" things that pull our attention. We love you Jesus, but we've got other things to do. We love you Jesus, but you aren't really the hot thing right now so we'll get back to when it's easier, simpler, more trendy. We love you Jesus, but this whole love your neighbors, care for the poor, speak up for the oppressed, speak truth to power thing is just exhausting and hard so we'll get back to it.

Let's face it, more often than not we are more interested in reducing our faith to a meme that is easily posted on Facebook that declares to all of our friends, "Hey, look at me, I'm a good Christian, I posted the Jesus thing on Facebook," than on actually taking a real, hard, honest look at what it means to be a faithful follower of Christ in the world of 21st century

America. It's more trendy to post the picture that says hey I prayed today, then it is to actually go out into God's world and put prayer into action with our own hands and feet. We'll say love your neighbor, until our neighbor is standing in front of us and they aren't what we want to look at and so we cross to the other side and try to convince ourselves we still did the Christian thing. We'll say take up your cross, until we're asked to help bear the burdens of another or our faith demands a smidge too much from us and our schedules and then we're like, yeah the cross is more Jesus' thing than ours. We'll say care for the poor, until we think the poor get too demanding and then we want them to have to have experienced the same things we have and pull themselves up by their bootstraps, even if they don't have any boots to begin with.

The heart of Jesus' words this morning is exactly that, where is your heart? Why are you here? Are you here because you think you have to be, because you're just doing what the rest of the crowds are, or are you here because you are ready and willing to do the real, get your hands dirty work of the gospel? Are you here because it looks good and you know you can sneak out the back whenever it gets too hard or it frustrates you? Or are you here because you know that at the end of the day, you don't care if Jesus is trendy or not, you're still going to line up and say I'll follow you? **AMEN**