

Do the words “fine print” make you nervous or do you just ignore them? And how often have we heard, “don’t sign a document” without reading the fine print? Whether reading a cereal box, examining a mortgage document, or watching a commercial on TV we all know about the fine print. And how often have we figured out that “fine print” is a way to hide the truth?

The way of the world is to make obvious what is easy, desirable, or sexy in LARGE print. And the way of the world is to hide what isn’t glamorous or filled with instantaneous reward. Fine print can mean tiny letters. But also, facts that missed or ignored. How often have you been caught unaware by the fine print?

In the reading from the Old Testament, it sounds as if that is what Jeremiah is saying. He cries out to God, “Look at what I have gotten into by following your call! I am a laughingstock; I am going against the grain of my culture. I am losing friends.” In a sense he said: “Why didn’t you help me read the fine print before answering your call to be a prophet?” Why didn’t you tell me this wouldn’t be easy?

In the Gospel, we Jesus said, *“Nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, nothing secret that will not become know.”* What Jesus means is, “The world’s large print IS always focused on the stuff that brings joy or earthly rewards. The hidden fine print is often the true cost of what you will pay. The real secret is no matter how much you have or can gather, a day will come when you unfortunately will die and all your stuff will be gone.

Who wants to read or hear that fine print? And for many, it is just ignored. But Jesus wants us to begin with the fine print so that we have a better sense for the demands and opportunities of the world in which we live. In other words, no surprises! And a lot of loving help along the way! Jesus pulls NO punches. His entrance helps us exit! His coming down lifts us up! His call is for commitment. In other words, reading the fine print and understanding that it really is good news and an antidote to the world’s lies and deceit.

Jesus’ disciples were amazed at how blessed they were to be chosen to follow Jesus. They had front row seats for amazing miracles. They marveled at his teachings and how powerfully he was able to preach. Their hearts were warmed by his welcome of outcasts, and they were blown away when he raised dead people back to life. Of course, they wanted to be with him longer! Of course, they wanted to follow him. Certainly, they were ready to share the good news and gather others to see and hear Jesus. They were pumped and ready to hit the streets.

And Jesus made sure they understood that there was to be no hidden surprises. He told them not everyone would welcome the good news of a new kingdom. He warned them that some of their family and friends wouldn’t invite them to parties any more. He told them the true cost of servant love. Jesus wasn’t trying to scare them but was preparing them for the price he would pay. Jesus was leading a revolution and the world would fight back with all its might!

At the same time, Jesus explained we wouldn’t have to face any or all of this alone. In Romans 6:5, St. Paul echoes Jesus’ promise as he wrote, “If we have been united w/Him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united w/him in a resurrection like his!” In other words, the world’s fine print about death is turned into great news about how Jesus turns it into life!

The world hides from death but Jesus lifts up. The world sells self-interest but Jesus washes feet. Advertisers tempt us to follow the crowd (so that we can make them rich.) Jesus says follow me as you already are rich! Faith enables us not to fear or be deceived by the world's fine print.

But how can we do what so much goes against the grain? There is a book called Atchison Blue, written by Judith Valente, a writer from NPR, whose husband is a judge in Chicago. It is the reflection of a well-educated and respected woman, who married later in life, and sought to return to faith.

Her journey led her to spend time in a monastery in Atchison, Kansas with a group of nuns who became her spiritual family. She rejoiced in her job and wonderful husband but struggled to feel accepted by his grown children.

It came to a head one Christmas when the stepdaughters' gifts to her seemed trite and forced. She was so frustrated because she wanted to love them, but really didn't like or trust them. This was the fine print of the extended family she had failed to understand when she got married.

One evening, while visiting with one of the nuns at Mount St. Scholastica monastery, she shared her frustration and guilt for not living in the faith she knew she was called to live. She asked, "How can I understand humility and write about it, but not live in it? Am I missing something in the fine print?"

The nun suggested she remember Paul's beautiful words in 1 Corinthians 13: "Love is patient, love is kind and not jealous. Love does not brag and is not arrogant ... love bears all things, hopes all things, endures all things, believes all things Love never ends."

The nun then told her to read it again, but substitute "God" for "love" ... and so the words of 1 Corinthians then sounded like this: "God is patient, God is kind and not jealous. God does not brag and is not arrogant ... God bears all things, God hopes all things, God endures all things, God believes all things, God's love never ends."

Judith was then told to substitute her own name instead of the word "love," which made it sound like this: "Judy is patient, Judy is kind and not jealous. Judy does not brag and is not arrogant ... Judy bears all things, Judy hopes all things, Judy endures all things, Judy believes all things, Judy's love never ends."

In that moment, she said she was filled with love, and the good news of faith became greater than the fine print of human selfishness, angst, and sin!

This is how Paul helps us to understand the fine print; that God's love changes us, so his love is in us. His embrace becomes our embrace. His life becomes ours, and that is what discipleship really means. Jesus said the same thing in a more direct way. "You are disciples. Don't be afraid of what that means! Anyone who loses or gives up their old life for my sake will find it!

In other words, when I surrender ME, the God who embraces me, forgives me, loves me, and gifts me with all I need, gives me back to the world as a gift – just as He is such a gift for me.

Is that not the finest print and the greatest promise ... ever?