

Uniquely Jesus: Counting the Cost | Pentecost 13 | Luke 14:25-35
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Jesus, the Son of God, calls us to leave all behind in order to follow him so that we might enter with him into the promised resurrection life.

Introduction

Question: Who, in his/her right mind, would begin to build a house without first sitting down to make sure s/he has enough money in the bank to actually finish the entire thing? Who, in his/her right mind, would begin building something without first asking if they are able to actually finish it before all the money runs dry?

And who, pray tell, would march his/her troops off to battle without thoroughly evaluating whether or not they have a legitimate chance of defeating their enemy? It seems terribly irresponsible, doesn't it?

We might "Ready, Fire, Aim" many things in our life but building a house? Going off to war? You wouldn't do that would you? Certainly not. That would just be foolish.

So why then, would you do that with Jesus? Why would you run off and begin following Jesus without first stopping in order to count the cost? Why would you begin following Jesus without first asking, "what impact is this going to have on my life? What is this going to cost me? What might I have to give up?"

That's what Jesus wants to know, anyway. Have you stopped to consider the cost of following Jesus?

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Now, to be sure, this isn't a great church growth strategy. We read in Luke 14:25 that 'great crowds' are following Jesus and he turns to them and says what we read earlier. Jesus has this huge following and instead of giving them some sort of flacid, self-help religion, he says this:

If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

Yikes. What is Jesus doing?!? He's got this following and instead of capitulating to the constituency, he looks them straight in the eye and says, "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple." For you and me, bearing a cross is a metaphor. For Jesus' audience here in Luke 14 it was anything but a figure of speech. To carry one's cross meant to walk toward literal death in the most painful, humiliating form available. So Jesus turns to this great crowd that is following him and lets them know, in no uncertain terms, that to follow him means to give up everything.

Jesus is certainly making sure his many followers know exactly what they're getting themselves into. Jesus is making sure that they know exactly what kind of disciple he is looking for. He's not looking for half-hearted followers who make all kinds of excuses. He's not looking for followers with all kinds of misplaced priorities. He's not looking for followers whose focus is not intently on Him. Jesus is reminding his followers to count the cost of being a disciple and that cost, it turns out, is very very high.

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Of course, if you read this passage like I did, I'm sure by now you've already decided in your head, well did Jesus *really* mean hate? Did Jesus *really* mean renounce *all* that I have? Wasn't Jesus *just* using the cross as a metaphor? Certainly Jesus is a pragmatist. Surely Jesus understands the necessities of 21st Century America. What we want, of course, is to blunt the words of Jesus to make them more palatable and to make ourselves more comfortable but I'm telling you, Jesus will have none of that. If we read the Bible, we're going to have to get comfortable with getting a little uncomfortable.

Jen and I just started going to that gym, Orange Theory. And there are certain points in the workout where they are quite upfront with the fact that we should be feeling a little uncomfortable. Not out of control. But uncomfortable. We should be pushing ourselves.

The last couple weeks we've been feeling a little uncomfortable with what Jesus is teaching us, haven't we? We've been feeling a little uncomfortable because Jesus is pushing us. He's prodding us. He's making us think about things that we'd rather not think about. And guess what? That's OK! You should be feeling a little uncomfortable in the sermon right about now. Not out of control...but uncomfortable. God's Word does that to us from time to time. And that's OK.

And why is it uncomfortable? It's uncomfortable because Jesus is all about reclaiming you and me for God's Kingdom. What Jesus is about is ripping you from the clutches of Satan and Sin and Death. Jesus is about keeping you in his flock and warding off the attempts of the Enemy to steal you away.

And Jesus accomplishes all of this by refusing to allow us to come to him with our own terms and conditions. Jesus refuses to allow us to come to him with our own agenda. Jesus refuses to allow us to come to him, first stating our own preferences and priorities. Jesus, quite simply, won't let us set the agenda for our discipleship. And that is the cost of discipleship.

When we sit down and count the cost of following Jesus, we come to realize that it's everything. It's all that we have. Nothing, not even family, not even life itself, can come before Him. That is the cost of discipleship. It's more than that, too. It's our possessions. It's our politics. It's our biases. It's football season. It's our pet sins. It's our preference for a particular style of worship. It's our preconceived notion of what church should be. It's our comfort zones. Jesus will allow none of these things to come before him. Jesus will allow none of these things to be made a priority before Him. Jesus will allow none of

these things to be terms and conditions that we come to him with. That is the cost of discipleship.

So, I ask. Have *you* counted the cost? Have you counted the cost not for someone else...but for yourself? Have you counted the cost? Perhaps you have. Perhaps you are right now. Maybe you're taking stock of your life like I am and you see all of the places that you have allowed to get in the way of your discipleship. Maybe you're taking stock right now and it's just dawned on you how you've been letting your politics come first and God's Word come second. Maybe it's just dawned on you how you've let your comfort and success at work come first, and held Jesus and his often times *uncomfortable* Word come second. Or third. Or forth. And now you are indeed feeling rather uncomfortable.

That OK.

What we find when we thoroughly examine ourselves we find that nothing we thought was important can actually be taken to Jesus. Nothing we tried to base our lives on or put our faith in can be brought to Jesus. Because it's all, ultimately, empty. And it will all, ultimately, fail.

In the end, we see that we cannot stand before God on our own merits. And so we have to stand before God on Jesus' merits. That's all there is. That is all we have.

We have a rabbi who, though he calls us to a radical discipleship, also walked a radical road in order that we might be given eternal life. It was Jesus who was rejected by his own family for us. It was Jesus who didn't think his life too important to give up for us. It was Jesus who, very literally, took up his cross and carried it to Golgotha. It was Jesus who renounced everything for us.

Jesus did, indeed, count the cost. He knew what it means to be the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He knew what it meant to be the savior of the world. He knew what it meant to be God's anointed. He knew it meant sure and certain rejection and death. He knew it meant walking the road of discipleship His Father laid out.

But he did it.

Why? He did it because He welcomes to himself imperfect disciples. He welcomes to himself disciples who are constantly wandering off rather than following in the footsteps of their Rabbi. He did it because he knew that when we count the cost we would find ourselves and our discipleship wanting. He did it because He knew that when we looked at our own accomplishments and compared it with His call...we would come up short. But he was not about to abandon us. He was not about to leave us to die or to be plucked from his flock by the hands of Satan.

Think of the apostle Peter. Peter was a disciple, a follower, of Jesus. He confessed that Jesus was the Christ, God's anointed Son who would be the Savior of the world. But

when all was on the line Peter denies Jesus; Peter denies even knowing him. But after Easter, the risen Jesus takes this man and calls him yet to an even more significant role in the life of Christ's church. Jesus calls him to lead this new movement of Jesus followers - a movement that expands from the city of Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and on to the ends of the earth.

This Jesus, by His death and resurrection, makes us imperfect, wavering, oftentimes faithless disciples ...His saving death and resurrection makes us perfect. Steadfast. Faithful disciples in the eyes of His Heavenly Father.

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We might think, then, you and I that Jesus' call to discipleship isn't really that big of a deal after all. We might think, you and I, that Jesus' call is just a fake-out. But that would be a mistake. Jesus doesn't let us off the hook.

Yes, Jesus runs after sinners like you and me. Jesus runs after the unfaithful. He, in fact, ran after us, grabbing ahold of us in our baptism and calls us His disciples. And because we are his disciples, he daily calls us to renounce everything for Him. Daily, He calls us to give up our own agenda in favor of his. Why? Because he knows that everything else in this life takes and takes from us. It sucks us dry and it crushes our souls. But Jesus, He gives and He gives. Jesus restores and Jesus refreshes.

Jesus knows that when we prioritize everything else in life, we are walking the road to death. So Jesus knows that to bring restoration and refreshment to His people, Jesus knows that he's got to clear some junk out first. There has to be a purging of the garbage: our own priorities and excuses and everything else that we put before Him. That's what Jesus is purging so that He can fill us up. That's the uncomfortable stuff that Jesus wants to do so that, on the other side, we reap the benefits of his incredible mercy and grace.

Our Psalm this morning tells us:

- ¹Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers,*
- ²but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night.*
- ³That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither— whatever they do prospers.*
- ⁴Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away.*
- ⁵Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.*
- ⁶For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.*

Remember what our OT lesson says this morning:

- ¹⁵See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction.*

16For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.

17But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them,

18I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.

19This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live

20and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

When we first encounter this text from Luke 14, at first blush, it might not be apparent why Jesus calls us to such a radical life of discipleship. Why does he say such things? You have to hate your family? Even hate yourself? Pick up your cross? Renounce all that we have? Jesus makes this pronouncement and shows us the cost of following Him because He knows that this is the only door that leads to life. Two weeks ago we talked about that narrow door. This is that narrow door. It's narrow, to be sure. Not everyone is able to heed the call of Jesus, not everyone who counts the cost is able to pay the steep price of following Jesus.

You see, Jesus knows that when you carry your cross and die with him, you will also be raised with him. Jesus knows that when you come to him with nothing, no agenda, no priorities, no life of your own, Jesus knows that when you come with nothing - because he's cleared out all the junk - Jesus knows that then, the Word of God can really go to work and the end result will be someone who is like a tree planted by streams of water. Doesn't that sound refreshing? Doesn't that sound life-giving? Does that sound like a life which will bear fruit for God's kingdom?

The call of Jesus this morning, then, is like God's call to Israel in Deuteronomy. It's a call to life. This is the irony and the paradox of Jesus. A call to death - that is, a death to our own agenda and priorities and preferences - this call to death is really a call to abundant, eternal life in Jesus.

Conclusion

So you see, Jesus calls us to radical discipleship. It's a discipleship that, to be sure, we wander from. We stray. We get caught up on our own stuff. But Jesus continually reminds us, through his word...his challenging word that he does not leave us or forsake us. No, he calls us again and again. He runs after us again and again. All so that he can bring us back. To, once again, empty us of all that leads us down the road to death, so that he can fill us with the life that comes with his grace, mercy and forgiveness. Amen.