

## **“The Cost of Discipleship”**

**Luke 14:25-35**

**Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost + September 4, 2022**

**Dear Friends in Christ,**

**Are you good at budgeting? If you are planning a project, are you good at sitting down and making a list of exactly what you need and what it is going to cost, and then deciding if you have enough to do it? Jesus gives two examples that show that in everyday life it can be embarrassing or downright disastrous if you have not counted the cost before you begin your project. “For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace” (vv. 28-32). The builder and the king both need to think it through ahead of time, plan, and decide.**

**In a similar way, Jesus practices full disclosure to those who would follow Him. He does not pull a bait-and-switch and tell you it is all going to be easy and then—surprise!—later on it gets tough. No, as He is on His way to Jerusalem to suffer, die, and rise again, He is very honest with the crowds. Some of them may have been simply curious. Others wanted to see miracles. Still others were probably hoping that He was going to set up an earthly kingdom and there would surely be a reward for them if they were some of His followers. Jesus busts all those bubbles and sets them straight. He tells them to count the cost if you are going to follow Him. And so He tells us. So, what is the cost?**

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**First of all, you must “hate” your family. “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” (v. 26). You must hate your own parents and spouse and siblings and children—and even**

**your own life—if you are going to be His disciple. I thought we were supposed to love our neighbor, and especially the people closest to us? Are we really called to hate the people closest to us in our family?**

**First of all, note that Jesus had a striking way of talking. He was not the kind of teacher who made things bland or vague or easy to forget. No, Jesus had a striking way of speaking that would stick with those who heard Him. You would never forget the pungent, stark terms that He used.**

**Secondly, let Scripture interpret Scripture. A close parallel to this section is Matthew 10. There Jesus uses a softer terminology where the word “hate” here corresponds to “not love more than.” In Matthew 10:37, when Jesus is giving instructions to the twelve disciples before sending them out, He says, “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”**

**Third, note the old Hebrew way of speaking. If you go back to the Old Testament, you will see that Jesus’ way of speaking is right out of the Scriptures. For example, think back to Jacob and his two wives, Leah and Rachel. Rachel was the younger of the two sisters and the one that Jacob really loved. He worked seven years for her father Laban in order to get Rachel, the beautiful daughter he was in love with, as his wife. But when the wedding came, Laban tricked Jacob and gave him Leah instead. (Fitting, in a way, for a man who had tricked his own father.) He then had to work another seven years for the privilege of having Rachel as his second wife. Genesis 29 tells us that Jacob “loved Rachel more than Leah” (v.30). Then it says, “When the Lord saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb” (v.31). So, Jacob loving Rachel more than Leah is the same as Leah being “hated.”**

**Fourth, this statement must be interpreted in light of the Lord’s commandment that children should honor our parents, that we are brothers and sisters in the faith who are called to love one another, and that husbands should love their wives as Christ loved the church.**

**Finally, remember what Jesus taught us about the new kinship ties in His kingdom. In fact, He demonstrated this in the way He dealt with His own relatives. In Chapter 8 we read, “Then his mother and his brothers came to him, but they could not reach him because of the crowd. And he was told,**

**‘Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see you.’ But he answered them, ‘My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it’” (Luke 8:19-21). Jesus is bringing in a whole new way of reckoning your family ties. It is not about what family you were born into, but whether you are reborn as a child of God through faith in Jesus.**

**In summary, then, when Jesus says here in Luke 14 that to follow Him means to “hate” our parents, our siblings, our children, and even our spouse, it simply means that Jesus is calling us to love Him more than these others, and, if necessary, to choose Him over these people who are dear to our hearts. Jesus is calling us to make our relationship with Jesus more important than any other relationship. We are talking the First Commandment here, God’s command not to have any other gods. There is no person or thing that we are to love or fear or trust more than we fear, love, and trust in God alone.**

**Parents idolize their children when they forget that their children are gifts of God. Really, the children are not ours at all. They belong to the Lord. Remember the words of Job after all ten of his children had been killed by a great wind that came across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house where they were gathered. He said, “The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21). This is why there is nothing more important parents can do than to bring their children for Holy Baptism and see to it that they are taught the word of Jesus. They are God’s children; let them know the ways of God, their Father. To put our children up on a pedestal and believe that our happiness comes only from their success—that is to expect them to do what only God can do. God is to be the source of our happiness and joy, and when our children give us joy and happiness we are to give God the glory and thanks.**

**Finally, note that Jesus says that, above all, a man is to “hate” his own self. This is also to be understood in light of the commandment to “Love your neighbor as yourself.” That assumes that people will love themselves. Yes, it is God’s will that we regard our own body and life as precious. He wants us to defend ourselves, to care for and nurture our own bodies. But, once again, if forced to make a choice, we will choose our allegiance to Jesus Christ even if it means giving up our body and life. Our love for Jesus is to be so strong, that, in**

comparison, our love for ourselves and the people around us can be called “hatred.”

How does God dare to demand such commitment from us? Is He some kind of tyrant? No, He is our Creator. He has made us; we are the sheep of His hand. He is our Redeemer. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, left nothing on the table when it came time to pay the ransom price for us. He even suffered hell for us, when God the Father turned away from Him in the cross. His victory is Your victory.

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Secondly, if you follow Jesus the cost includes this: you will have to bear your cross. Verse 27: “Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.” This section picks up what we read in Chapter 9, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?” (vv.23-25).

So, what does it mean to bear our own cross? It is easy to forget what that symbol and that word “the cross” must have meant to people before Jesus Himself died on a cross and rose again from the dead. It was a hated and gruesome means of execution. No Roman citizen could be nailed to a cross, only foreigners and slaves. How shocking, then, for this crowd following Jesus to hear that they must each bear their own cross and come after Him. To “bear the cross” means more than just putting up with the troubles that are common to mankind. It means the troubles and afflictions that come to Christians because of our connection with Jesus. Paul wrote to Timothy, “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12). For some Christians in some times and places this has been quite severe, even to the point of death. Indeed, normally the only time a person would bear a cross is when he was out on his way to be crucified. Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem to bear His cross out to Calvary where they nailed Him on it. In other times and places, persecution might be quite mild. And then there is the personal battle we each face against our own sinful nature, seeking to resist sinful pleasures, stressing over loved ones who do not follow the Lord Jesus Christ,

not bearing a grudge or plotting to get even with those who sin against us but rather turning the other cheek. None of these would cause us any grief if we were not following the Lord Jesus.

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**Thirdly: renounce your possessions. Verse 33: “So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.”** The question for the would-be follower of Jesus Christ is, “Are you willing to separate yourself from your possessions for Him?” It is often translated “to express a formal farewell” or “to take leave of.” In other words, to count the cost of being a disciple means to let go of all that is ours. We recognize that we do not own it. We have already spoken of this with regard to our children. If they are not really ours, how much less the land we call our own, our house, our vehicles, our machinery. “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof” (Psalm 24:1)—this planet and all that fills it belongs to the Lord. “For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills” (Psalm 50:10).

In a way, the Lord does us a favor, if we are blessed with a long life, when He allows us to gradually fail in our health. When we can no longer enjoy our stuff in the way that we did when we were young—then we learn to lessen our grip on all the stuff for which we have toiled and sweated. We learn to let go. Maybe that’s a way He helps us follow Jesus more closely as we get up in years. We see more clearly how much the possessions of this life really are not ours at all. We recognize that so much of our stress and worry to try to get ahead was really not worth it in the long run. After all, the day we die is the day we lose everything—everything, that is, except Jesus Christ and the gifts that He has prepared for us, the inheritance in heaven that will never perish or spoil or fade. We remember what Jesus told us in Chapter 12, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Luke 12:15). One’s life consists in your attachment to Jesus Christ, and the life that He gives to you!

So, shall we all sell everything and give the money to the poor? No, but just remember that you are a steward, a manager. Everything you have is really the Lord’s. He’s the boss. He’s the one to whom you will have to give an account. Take what He has loaned to you and use it in the ways that are

**pleasing to Him: Give the first fruits to the Lord and His work; provide for yourself and your family. Pay your taxes. Support your community. Be there to help others in need.**

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**Finally, Jesus teaches that His disciples who count the cost are genuine. “Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? <sup>35</sup> It is of no use either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown away. He who has ears to hear, let him hear” (vv.34-35). We use salt for enhancing the flavor of food that is bland. But in the ancient world, salt was critical because it was the only method for preserving food. Is somehow salt were to lose its taste, if it became dull or flat, it would be useless. It would be worse than table scraps or other compost—it would do nothing for the soil or even help the manure pile decompose. All you could do is throw it out.**

**The world is subject to decay. True disciples are the salt of the earth. We are in the world to counteract the coming destruction. Surely God would long ago have destroyed the earth were it not for the Christians in it. In a sense, true followers of Christ make the world palatable to God. Jesus is speaking here about genuineness; we are not to be hypocrites, that is, disciples in name only. Jesus is warning the crowd, and us, not just to be following Him outwardly, but to be the real deal, the genuine disciple, the one who truly turns away from sin and trusts in His forgiveness. He is calling us to truly let go of family ties and possessions and instead take up our cross and follow Him.**

**If you count the cost and follow Jesus, what awaits you? All the blessings that Jesus won for you when He got to Jerusalem are yours: forgiveness for your sins, justification before God, triumph over the grave, membership in God’s family and kingdom, the privilege of prayer, the comfort of the Holy Spirit. If you have ears, then listen up!**

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