

# COUNT THE COST

Luke 14:25-35

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Series C)

September 8, 2019

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The gospel lesson for the Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost comes from *The Gospel According to Luke*, chapter 14, verses 25 through 35. It is on page 739 of the pew Bible. In this gospel lesson, Jesus forces us to question whether following him is really worth it. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From Luke 14, beginning at verse 25, we read in Jesus' name.

<sup>25</sup> Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, <sup>26</sup> "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. <sup>27</sup> Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. <sup>28</sup> 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? <sup>29</sup> Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, <sup>30</sup> saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' <sup>31</sup> 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? <sup>32</sup> And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. <sup>33</sup> So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

<sup>34</sup> "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."

*Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.*

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

---

So you want to follow Jesus. Have you counted the cost? Do you know what this demands?

On the one hand, being a disciple of Jesus costs nothing. Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone. You cannot earn even the smallest part of it. In this way, being a disciple of Jesus costs nothing.

But on the other hand, it also costs everything. It means that Jesus is your teacher and master. It means that he owns you. "You are not your own, you were bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6:19-20). You are redeemed and forgiven. In this respect you have freedom from sin, death, and the devil. But this freedom from everything evil means you are a slave to everything good, and you are not free to follow the sinful desires of your heart. Your life belongs to the one who purchased you.

So there is this paradox of the Christian life. On the one hand, being a disciple of Jesus costs nothing, but, on the other hand, it also costs everything.

This is what Jesus teaches us in the Gospel lesson. And to say that Jesus teaches us this might be an understatement. It's more like a warning.

Great crowds were accompanying Jesus. And Jesus seems to have this habit that whenever great crowds start following him, he knows they must not really understand what he's all about,

so he says something difficult. And Jesus says something really difficult here: “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” (14:26).

There are really two difficulties here. The first is difficult for our minds, and the other is difficult for our hearts.

The first difficulty, the one that bothers our minds, has to do with that word “hate.” I can still hear my mother say to me when I was a child, “‘Hate’ is such a strong word.” Are we really supposed to hate our “own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters”? This seems to contradict a number of commandments. The Fourth Commandment teaches us to honor our father and mother, not hate them. And in a broader application of the Fourth Commandment, Scripture commands parents to love and care for their children (e.g., Eph. 6:4). And, as for wives, the Sixth Commandment has something to say about that. Scripture commands husbands to love them. And, as for brother and sister, they are much closer than other neighbors, and we are commanded to love them too. In short, Jesus’ seems to contradict the entire second table of the Law, which can be summarized in one command: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18).

So what do we do with this? Should we throw out the Fourth through Tenth commandments and just be really mean to everyone? Of course not. That would contradict, not merely the teaching of Moses, but also the teaching of Jesus. Jesus teaches us to love and serve and obey him by loving and serving those around us. So perhaps there is a different way to understand Jesus when he says, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate [all these people], yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.” A better way to understand it is this: Jesus is talking about where our loyalties lie. Who has first place in our lives? Who has your loyalty? Jesus means, *I must be the first, to whom there is no second.*

Now we might think, *Well, why can't I be loyal to more than one person? Why can't I be loyal to my parents and to Jesus? Why can't I be loyal to my husband or wife and to Jesus?* In practice, most of the time you can. Most of the time, what your parents tell you to do will be in harmony with what God's Word commands. And, hopefully, what your husband or wife desires will also be in harmony with God's Word. Most of the time, an action that is pleasing to our family or friends will also be pleasing to Jesus. But if you're thinking that Jesus can have 50% of your loyalty, your wife can have 20%, your kids can share another 20%, and everyone else can split up the last 10%, then you're already compromising. And what's going to happen when a conflict arises? If you split up your loyalty like this, you've already decided that, at least once in a while, your spouse or children or someone else is going to get their way over the will of Jesus. And you know this happens. They say, “But we go to Church every Sunday. Why can't we, just once a month, stay home and sleep in or watch cartoons in our pajamas. We're still giving Jesus 75%.” And there are a thousand other ways we might compromise. If we think of our loyalty as being rationed out, there will always be compromises between the percentages.

There is no order of priority where Jesus is number one, someone else is number two, another person is number three, and so on. There is only Jesus as number one. And then we see that Jesus' will for us is to love all the people God has placed in our lives. Our love for others is simply a manifestation of our love for Jesus. So Jesus is number one, and we love everyone else through him. Now you might wonder, *What's the difference? If Jesus is just going to tell me to love those people, why do I have to think of it this way?* Because when we love people as a manifestation of our love for Jesus, we love them the way Jesus desires for us to love them. We love them according to God's commandments.

## COUNT THE COST (Luke 14:25-35t)

It's become common in our world to think that loving a person means we must always affirm them. Whatever they feel or whatever they do must be affirmed. This is really illogical. When someone's feelings or actions are destructive to themselves or to another person, it is really not loving to affirm that. And this is the nature of sin. Sin is always destructive. God's commandments are given to us for our protection. So whenever we break his commandments, we bring harm upon ourselves or others, and it is not loving to affirm this. Instead, we should offer a loving alternative.

I'll give you an example, and this is a pretty serious one. Suppose you have a friend who is unexpectedly pregnant. You don't have to affirm the actions that led up to this. And if her boyfriend wants to leave because he can't handle the responsibility, we should not affirm that either. And if she says she wants to have an abortion, we should not affirm that. It would not be loving to affirm any of these things. However, it would also not be loving to simply voice our disapproval and walk away. We should recognize our friend is in a very difficult position. We should be sympathetic and offer our help. That help may take the form of financial assistance, baby-sitting, or even a place to live. Love speaks the truth in a sensitive way, proclaims Jesus' forgiveness, and gives what is needed. We love, not by affirming what is evil, but by serving them in the way God desires.

This is the kind of love that might not always be appreciated. When a person really just wants us to affirm a bad choice, they might not be happy when our form of love is different. This is why our love may sometimes be called "hate." Now, sometimes, when a Christian is accused of being hateful, it might actually be true. But sometimes an unwanted form of love is also called "hate." This is one of the many ways we may suffer for the sake of Christ.

---

And this leads to the second difficulty. This one bothers our hearts, which makes it much more difficult. We must despair even of our own lives for the sake of Christ. This is where we must really count the cost. It's one thing to prioritize Jesus over our families, especially when we realize that Jesus gives us back to love our families. But it's another thing to prioritize him over ourselves. This really strikes at our hearts. It doesn't strike at our minds so much. It's easy for our brains to agree that Jesus should have priority over ourselves. But it strikes at our hearts in a most unbearable way, because we naturally love ourselves above all.

Jesus says, **"Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple"** (15:27). Now what does it mean to bear our own cross? The simple answer is that it means to suffer. And it specifically means to suffer for the sake of following Christ. We should not think of every form of suffering as a cross to bear. Most suffering is simply the result of the fall into sin. If your car breaks down and you can't afford to fix it, that's not a cross to bear, because it happens to lots of people, not just Christians. It is a result of the fall into sin. Being a Christian has nothing to do with it. However, if you lose your job because your employer requires you to do something immoral, and you refuse, that would be a cross. And, compared to some other crosses, it's a fairly light one.

For many Christians, bearing their own crosses literally meant carrying a wooden cross, in order to be hung on them to die. Sometimes those crosses were even lit on fire. For many Christians, bearing their crosses has meant being burned alive, boiled alive, cut in pieces, or whatever other creative methods persecutors come up with to torture and kill Christians. This continues today more than ever. When Jesus tells us to hate our own lives and bear our own crosses, martyrdom is most definitely on the table, even though it is actually required of few.

## COUNT THE COST (Luke 14:25-35t)

And this, of course, is the kind of cross Jesus bore. He does not ask us to do anything he was not willing to do for our sake. So when we talk about bearing our crosses and following Jesus, it's essential to look at what this meant for Jesus.

For Jesus, the cross meant death. This teaches us that for us, too, bearing our crosses means death. I'll say that again, because this is essential to understand what Jesus is talking about: *Bearing our crosses means death.* That's what the cross was invented for. This means martyrdom for a few Christians, and not all, but it still means death for all of us. It means a different kind of death than what we usually think of. It is a death to self and a death to sin.

This corresponds to what Jesus' death accomplished. Jesus' death was the end of sin. Obviously I don't mean that people automatically stopped sinning. That would be nice, but it would also mean the end of the world. I mean that every sin was laid upon Jesus and was atoned for by his death. It was the end of sin in the sense that sin no longer reigns over God's children, and it no longer threatens us with eternal condemnation.

So when Jesus tells us to take up our crosses and follow him, it means that we must die to sin. It's like what Paul says in Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives within me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." And he says in Colossians 3:5, "Put to death ... what is earthly in you."

This is the real struggle of the Christian life. It doesn't mean carrying a wooden cross just once and dying on it. It means fighting against sin every single day. It means denying ourselves every day. This struggle continues for our entire lives, because we can't change our nature. We can't extinguish our selfishness. It keeps coming back. And that is why this is so hard. Giving in and letting sin have free reign would be the easy thing to do for this life. Fighting against it until our dying day is the hard thing. That is why Jesus tells us to count the cost. If we expect this to be easy, we will be disappointed. But if we expect it to be worth it in the end, we will be surprised just how short our expectations fall of the glory to be revealed.

When we take up our crosses and follow Jesus, we follow the one who passed through death for our sake and rose victoriously on the other side of the grave. As you take up your cross and follow Jesus, look at him. Fix your eyes on the one you follow, because he bore his cross for you. He bore his cross to atone for your sins and grant you eternal life. So you do not bear yours in order to earn anything from God. He forgives you freely and grants you eternal life for Christ's sake. And so, just as Jesus rose from the dead and lives forever, he will also raise you from the dead to live forever in his new creation. We look forward to this day, not merely for the bliss we will experience or the joy of seeing our Savior face to face, but also because there will be no more crosses there. There will be no more struggle with sin. Imagine that, if you can. You will delight in everything good. You will find joy in everything that is righteous. And there will be nothing there that is not good and righteous.

Your cross is temporary. Your resurrection is eternal. And that is what makes it all worth it. When you count the cost, you will see that if we hope in Christ for this life only, the cost is too high. But if our hope is in the life to come, it is nothing. Count the cost. Take up your cross. Follow the one who carried his cross for you. Amen.

---

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.