

“Disciple?”

Luke 14:25-33

Now large crowds were traveling with him; and he turned and said to them, “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. For which of you intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying “This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.” Or, what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? If he cannot, then while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.” THIS IS THE WORD OF THE LORD.

How do people of God choose discipleship, and what does it look like when they choose it? The question is nowhere as vivid as in Jesus’ teachings about accepting all of the consequences of coming to him and following him. Three times in this passage Jesus says a person cannot be a disciple. First, he requires a person to hate parents, spouse, children, siblings, and even one’s own life. Second, he commands carrying the cross and following him. Third, he demands the giving up of all possessions. Faithful discipleship is definitely not for the faint of heart. We are somewhat prepared for this continuation of Luke 14, however, if we have been reading the passage from last week with its stress on blessings and righteous living by making the guest and hosts of a wedding banquet the poster children for how **not** to behave in the realm of God in the face of resurrection. Between the passages for this week and last, there is the parable of the great supper with the feast being held for the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind from near and far.

The stakes rise throughout this chapter as it becomes clearer what is at stake when one says that he or she wishes to follow Jesus. Hence, Jesus uses strong language to spell out the high cost of discipleship – it must be total dedication that moves from wish to careful deliberation and decision making. It cannot be done on impulse, because Jesus knows that the cross looms ever before his followers. I must remind you, the hearers of the word, that the cross also emerges before us. Jesus boldly declares that we should not even begin this journey unless we are willing to go all the way!

In exploring the theological meaning and importance of the cost of discipleship, it is important to stress the notion of cost along with discipleship. This term for “cost” appears only once in the New Testament, and it is in this passage. Cost is what we give up to acquire, accomplish, maintain, or produce something. It involves a measure of sacrifice and perhaps loss or penalty in gaining something. Cost requires effort and resources.

When coupled with discipleship and accepting and spreading the good news of Jesus Christ, one can see the power of Jesus’ call in this passage and the commitment it demands of us as hearers and doers of the word. Discipleship, we must remember, is a process. This takes time and involves both false starts and modest successes, as we grow in our faith journeys to live into the fullness of our humanity and dare to begin to live in the Holiness that resides in each of us. As disciples, we learn to face life’s challenges and joys with a spirit of love, hope, faith, and peace that leads us to an ever-deeper spirituality and life of prophetic witness.

For example, rather than accept the slow pace and often inept attempts of the federal government to aid in the rebuilding of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast after Hurricane Katrina in 2005, many people of faith have traveled to the area – often repeatedly – to help rebuild, using whatever skills they have. This is the church coming alive in its discipleship as people of faith spread the good news through their active witness in helping those who have been and continue to be brutalized by poorly constructed levees and abject neglect.

In the process of becoming living disciples, we must, as Jesus states, also learn to give up all our possessions - our need to acquire, our yearning for success, our petty jealousies, our denigrating stereotypes of others, our prejudices and hatreds and more – and follow the way of Jesus, as we place ourselves on an

ever-treading potters wheel to examine our thoughts, words, and actions. These possessions keep us further and further away from the Christlike walk to which Jesus invites us in discipleship.

We can observe this in our own congregation or in people's life circumstances in general. An example to explore is how overwork can become an addiction that keeps us from nurturing our relationships with our families, friends, and God. Overwork itself becomes a possession that we can hoard through rationalizations such as, "I promise that after I am done with this project, I will not take on so much anymore". This passage from Luke gives me the opportunity to invite folks to step back and engage in that deep process of reflection that discipleship demands of us, to explore whether we are being followers and doers of the word or if we are measuring our lives by human yardsticks.

At the heart of discipleship is transformation. The cost of discipleship is not just becoming accumulators of new information about life and living it fully or changing our behavior in regard to Jesus' teachings. The cost is engaging in a profoundly radical shift toward the ethics of Jesus with every fiber of our beings. There is no driftwood in discipleship, as we are called to live lives of complete devotion to God. Jesus reminds us in today's passage from Luke that following him means that we cannot be shallow or uncommitted believers.

As part of this transformation, the cost of discipleship means entering into an intimate relationship with God in Christ that teaches us that obedience to God is not blind. It is a thought-probing and deliberative process in which we grow in our ability to ask the tough questions about life and living, not only of God, but also of ourselves. This intimate relationship invites us to mature in our faith. Yes, the cost of discipleship also includes salvation – a theme that runs throughout the passages of Luke for the last three weeks. "The call to discipleship is a gift of Grace and that call is inseparable from grace." (Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

BENEDICTION:

Again, there is a pragmatism to Jesus' instructions, as he lets his disciples know that the road, he is walking is **not** without its sacrifices; to follow Jesus is **not** without its heavy demands; to carry the cross is **not** without its tangible consequences. We must be willing to endure these consequences if we ever hope to experience the promised rewards of following Jesus' way. Go in Peace.