

Cost of Discipleship – Luke 14

Sermon For Sunday September 7, 2025

A few years ago a church received a healthy financial gift in memory of a member who had just passed. The gift specifically went to the cemetery fund, and as this congregation was wanting to install a columbarium in their cemetery, the gift provided a nice start to the total cost of this project. The cemetery committee then started going around to many of the local churches that had installed a columbarium and taking measurements, pictures and just gathering ideas so they too could get started on their project. About a month later a colleague met up with the pastor of that church and asked him how their progress with their columbarium was going. That was when he got the other side of the story. Turns out the memorial money was burning a hole in the pockets of the committee. They didn't have enough saved up for a columbarium, but they knew they wanted to go in that direction. The chair of the committee was adamant that they go ahead and spend this financial gift and pour the concrete foundation and the concrete pad that their future columbarium would sit on. The pastor and several of the other members of the committee were hesitant to do that, especially since they had no specific or concrete (pun intended) plans for an actual columbarium. The pastor called it "putting the cart before the horse" which I think is an appropriate description of the situation. Luckily reason won, and the church as a whole decided to wait until they had the money for the whole thing, and not just the concrete pad. It's perfectly fine to plan for the future, but as the church, we need to be cautious of "putting the cart before the horse."

In our Gospel today Jesus tells a crowd that is following him that they need to be planning for their future and for Jesus, that future means looks very different. Jesus tells his disciples they will have a cross to bear, and they must carry it in order to follow him. That doesn't sound like good news because the cross is an instrument of death and torture. However, in order to bear it, the time to plan for it is now, because its coming. Jesus uses two examples of planning ahead: The first is of a person that wants to build a tower. That is similar to this local church that wanted a columbarium, putting the cart before the horse. The next is about a King who must decide if his troops are strong

enough to eliminate twice as many, and if not, he must send a delegation of peace. Both of these examples show us that there is a bigger picture that we have to look towards. That bigger picture may put us at odds with those that we love, or even with ourselves. That is because following Christ is a radical path to take. It is a conflict with many of the things we face on a daily basis. It can be a conflict with logic, with sound reason, or even a conflict with our beliefs and understandings of the church. That is why we have to plan for those moments. We all have moments where we want to put the cart before the horse, where we have what we think is a good idea or the best....but others may think it is illogical or even crazy. And so stepping back and looking at the bigger picture, is what is in order.

Luke quotes Jesus as saying “Whoever does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” The word used there for disciple also translates as “learner.” To use that translation, we get a slightly different understanding here. Whoever does not carry his cross and follow Jesus cannot be his learner. Reading it in that way gives me the vision of Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus, while Martha busily prepares the festival meal, being frustrated and probably muttering under her breath that her sister is not helping. But Jesus’ comment on that one is that Mary chose the better part. Learning from Jesus is always the better part. Discerning what cross we bear in life is a part of that learning. It is the cost of our discipleship.

In our text Jesus finishes his teaching by telling the crowds that in order to become his disciple they had to give up all their possessions. As if bearing a cross wasn’t hard enough. We all know humans have a need to have “stuff”. So much so that we pay a storage facility to store all the stuff that won’t fit in our houses. Could you give up everything you have in order to be a disciple? Or to put it another way, could you empty yourself of everything you have in order to gain discipleship. Emptying ourselves is not just giving of time and talents, it is not just helping at community needs center or collecting food or delivering school supplies. Instead, it is all these things together. Eventually we do indeed reach that point where we are empty of all these things. That point is the moment in time when we move from the church militant into the church triumphant and into the eternal care of God. We can’t take anything with us, we can’t buy our way in. But we don’t wait until the final moments of breath to

reconcile our souls. Instead, we plan for that moment by living a life in service to God. We strive to plan ahead, rather than getting caught up in the moment. We have to have moments of reason, and yet realize we are on a radical path that doesn't always agree with humanity. Resurrection itself is radical when we compare it to the human life. We are born, and one day we will die. But resurrection adds a third element, life everlasting. That is the tower we are working towards, even though we are still working on the foundation. But thankfully we have enough to build the tower, because in baptism Christ has claimed us as his own, and we know that we will reach the pinnacle. The battle will be won, the tower will be built, and we will see what a truly possession less life looks like, as we bask in the glory that is the Kingdom of God. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.