

Consider the Cost  
Luke 14:25-35  
September 4, 2016

*Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, “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. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. 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. So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple. Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? 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.”*

Church consultant Alex McManus holds training events for people who feel a call from God to launch new communities of faith. For several years, McManus has promoted these events with this invitation: “Heroes wanted for a quest to save the universe. Safe return doubtful.” By using this kind of language, McManus captures two often-neglected elements in Jesus’ core message: mission and cost.

Both of those elements are present in Jesus’ words about discipleship in today’s reading, but to really hear what he was saying, we need remember that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem to die on a cross and rise from the dead. If we don’t keep that in mind, we might hear Jesus’ words simply as a call to some unattainable life or perhaps even to an undesirable life.

I don’t know anyone who gets all thrilled and excited thinking about a life in which family members, including parents, spouses, and children, are hated. Can you even imagine what it would mean to completely turn away from life as you know it and give away all of your possessions?

If we walk away from this text with only these kind of thoughts in our mind, we will have missed the true force of Jesus’ words. That’s because in today’s text Jesus reminds us of the Gospel’s call to the only life worth living – a life of full commitment to God’s mission as a disciple of our Savior.

The central focus of Jesus’ words in our reading is the cost of being a disciple. Verses 28-32 contain two parables that Jesus uses to help his audience recognize discipleship for what it is – a total life-transforming experience.

These parables are intended to make the people rethink their understanding of wealth, family and self-preservation. These parables highlight the riskiness of following Jesus

without fully thinking through the cost of discipleship. The assumption is that no one wants to be a builder, whose grand design ends in mockery because of lack of preparation. No one wants to be a king whose supposed military power wilts in the presence of a greater force which forces him to surrender.

So how does one properly prepare to be Jesus' disciple? When we ask that question, we hear our text as an invitation to a bold and daring new way of life. The answer is unique and it flies in the face of worldly teaching on how to achieve advancement and security.

Again, Jesus' words must be understood in light of his journey to Jerusalem. Verse 25 tells us that Jesus is traveling. But Jesus is not merely continuing his traveling ministry around Israel. His movement is intentional and there is an end in mind.

If you go back to the ninth chapter of Luke's Gospel account, you find these words: *As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem* (Lk 9:51 NIV). While Jesus is speaking the words of today's text, he is seeing the cross in his own future. Verse 27 of the reading spells out the cost of discipleship: *"Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple"* (Lk 14:27 NIV).

Consequently, to live as Jesus' disciples, we need to embrace the cross as the central value in life. This doesn't mean wearing a cross as jewelry or as a tattoo or displaying fancy crosses as pieces of art. We must resist all attempts to romanticize the call to bear the cross or to spiritualize it in terms of simple self-denial.

The bottom line is that Jesus is explaining to his would-be followers that God's mission is advanced by men and women who see the cross as a call to die to this sinful world and their sinful nature so they can follow Jesus into places where only people who have turned their back on the world would dare to go.

God's mission through Jesus is a bold and daring one. And Jesus' disciples must understand that this call will change their lives today and in the future. Our culture screams, "Look out for #1. Protect your own interests. Market and promote yourself." Jesus' call is the opposite: Embrace the cross. Find life by willingly giving away your life for the sake of God's mission in the world.

Jesus emphasizes the cost of discipleship by using the often misunderstood language of hating your family. In Jesus' day, a person's family was on the top of everyone's priority list. However, the call to follow Jesus, runs contrary to this understanding of life. Jesus' disciples possess a total allegiance to Jesus that comes before all other relational relationships – including family, race, economic status, political affiliation, and social connections.

When Jesus says we must hate our family, he is not using the word hate as we might use it. For the people of Jesus' day, turning your allegiance from your family to anything else was the same as hatred. For us today, Jesus is saying that anything we would not

give up to be his disciple makes our commitment to him less than what it should be.

Finally, Jesus concludes our text with a statement about possessions. It has been said: *The last part of a person to be converted to Christ is his or her wallet.* A person's possessions tell much about how a person understands status. If we are to carefully count the cost of following Jesus, we must embrace a life that puts very little importance on possessions.

Jesus' followers are neither defined nor limited by the size of their bank accounts, the amount of stuff that they own, the size of their house, the make of their car, or what zip code they live in. This text calls us to freely rid ourselves of any appearance of status for the sake of God's mission.

The status that we present to the world sets the limits of our ability to reach others with the Gospel. Appearances of superiority or class may puff us up, but they cancel out our witness as followers of Jesus. This text calls us to consider the cost.

Surfers are an unusual group of people. They display an almost obsessive commitment to riding the waves. Surfers just love to surf. Kids cut classes, adults skip work or take vacation days from work just for the chance to paddle out into the ocean looking for the perfect wave. One of the most common questions surfers hear from non-surfers isn't, "How were the waves?" but "Aren't you afraid of getting attacked by a shark?"

It's a reasonable question. Anyone who has ever taken a dip in the ocean or watched the movie *Jaws* has probably worried, at least for a moment, about the possibility of encountering a shark. But given the obvious fun that surfers have, the question about sharks misses the point of surfing.

Surfers ride the waves because they find it life-changing. Surfers will tell you that when a person stands up on a surfboard and feels the power of the ocean for the first time, he or she will never be the same again. Every trip to the beach represents a new opportunity to re-experience the exhilaration of riding waves. Surfers don't worry about sharks because they are more interested in catching the next wave than they are in worrying about a potential meeting with a sharp-toothed predator.

Our text today calls us to a similar counting of the cost versus the gain. Following Jesus into the world on his mission is the highest expression of human life. It is the life that each of us was created to live and experience. But this calling and this mission have costs. They demand that we rethink and realign our values, our priorities, and our very lives so that we might come in line with the Gospel.

Our highest calling is no longer defined by allegiance to family, or lifestyle, or culture. Our reason to live is not mere survival. Our worth is not measured by our bank accounts or possessions. All these things become secondary to God's mission. The words of Jesus remind us that God's call is to live for a mission and a cause that is bigger than ourselves. We are called to: *"Love the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our strength and with all our mind and to love our neighbors as ourselves."* (Lk 10:27)

NIV).