

September 8, 2019
Pentecost 13/Proper 18
Luke 14:25-33

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

Counting the Cost

Counting the cost. That's the theme of our text. It's also good advice because you don't want to start a project and not finish it. What if you engage in a war without having enough manpower to win it? This would be foolish, would it not? Of course! Before you engage in a war or a project, you must count the cost. If you don't, you'll never finish.

Counting the cost. Being a disciple of Christ for a while, but not staying the course, is a matter of eternal consequences. Thus, questions arise:

- What will it take to remain a disciple of Jesus?
- Will I have to give up anything?

These are not easy questions. For the Christian, the most dangerous thing in the world is impenitence. Impenitence is a refusal to turn away from sin. An impenitent sinner is one who lives on comfortable terms with his sins.

Indeed, he does not fight against his sins but lives impenitently in them. He does not feel guilty. He does not fear God's wrath. He does not know that he is ripe for destruction. If he leaves this life without repentance, Jesus says, "Cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness ... where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 25:30).

...Counting the cost. Jesus tells us what this entails. He says, "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." (Luke 14:25-26) Hate? Really? . . . More shortly.

In the meantime, know this: When Christ called you to discipleship, he called you to come and die! Yes, he called you to come and die to yourselves and your sinful desires. This is painful and difficult, for our sinful nature beckons us to indulge in whatever pleases us. But Jesus calls us to hate our sins.

But you should know that, before Jesus called us to die to ourselves, he had already died to himself. The heavenly Father had already counted the cost to make our discipleship possible. What would it cost him to pay for the sins of mankind? It couldn't be a member of fallen humanity, for humanity itself is the problem.

Who, then, could be the Savior? Listen to the opening words of Revelation 5. The Apostle John writes:

I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, and I began to weep loudly because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. And one of the elders said to me, “Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals” (Rev. 5:2-5)

Who is worthy? There is One, but only One who is worthy. He is The Lion of the tribe of Judah who is also “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”¹ He alone is worthy. His name is Jesus.

God considered the cost to build the temple of our salvation. And what a cost it was! God sent his Son, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. Jesus had to be God for his sacrifice to be a sufficient sacrifice for all human sin. And he had to be truly man in order to be tempted as we are, and yet remain sinless.

The Son of God also counted the cost. He left heaven. He left his Father and the angelic hosts behind. When he had reached manhood, his disciples left him. After they fled, the Roman soldiers and Temple guards took him captive.

He is nailed to a cross. It appears to the world as if he has not counted the cost. It seems as if he began to build the Kingdom of Heaven and was not able to finish it. It looks as if he intended to be the Savior but couldn't quite make it. How terrible to bring such shame upon himself!

But the wisdom of God is greater than the stratagems of men. It's the Friday of his crucifixion. He is barely clinging to life. Under the cover of a supernatural darkness, he cries out, “It is finished!”² At that very moment, Christ the crucified became Christ the Victor. The atonement for all human sin was completed. The temple of salvation was built. He who started to build had counted the cost to finish the job for which he was sent.

The multitudes who heard Jesus speak that day are gone. Most of those who started to follow Jesus abandoned their discipleship. Crucifixion has a way of doing that. A few held on. A few remained. There are always a few: Mary Magdalene, Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, a handful of women, and the apostles.

But in our text, the cross was still future. And Jesus knew that his very name would cause division. Not long before, Jesus said to his disciples, “Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division” (Luke 12:51) And now he speaks of division once again, saying, “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.

So what does this mean? What does it mean “to hate”? We must seek to understand this question in light of the rest of Scripture.

We look at Genesis 29. There we find the story of Jacob and his relationships with Rachel and Leah. There, we read these words: “[Jacob] loved Rachel more than Leah.” (Gen. 29:30).

In the very next verse, we learn that to love someone less than another is called hate. Leah occupied second place in Jacob’s heart and Rachel first place. This second-place love is called “hate.” As always, we find that Scripture interprets Scripture.³

When Jesus says we can’t be his disciples unless we hate our family members, he means that we must love them less than him.

That is, we are to give him first place in our lives. If ever we are to make a choice between following Jesus or following our families, we follow Jesus. But he who gives Christ second place gives him no place.

Let me illustrate. A man named Jim Denison went on a mission trip to Malaysia. While there, he worshiped at a small Malaysian church. One Sunday before the service, Jim noticed an old suitcase sitting on a pew. When he asked about it, the pastor pointed out a teenage girl. He told Jim about the cost of her discipleship. She wanted to be baptized early that morning. Her baptismal joy was contagious and it spilled over onto the whole congregation.

“But,” said the pastor, “there’s a sad side to her story. The girl’s father told her that if she was baptized, she’d better pack her bags because her family would disown her. So she brought her luggage to church with her.”

She loved Jesus more than her family. And the congregation loved her and took care of her.

Like her, we must bear our crosses as well. As she was persecuted, so we must not flee persecution when it finds us. God permits persecution. He does so, not to punish us, but to purify us, i.e., to make us more fruitful Christians.

There is no love is greater than the heavenly Father’s love for you. There is no greater proof of that love than the cross. Yes, Christ’s blood cleanses you from all sin. (1 John 1:7). There is no sin so great that it cannot be forgiven.

- A repentant Peter, who denied Christ three times, nevertheless received the Lord’s forgiveness.
- A penitent St. Paul, who persecuted Christ’s church, also received his forgiveness.
- King David, the murderer and adulterer, cried to the LORD, saying, “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.”⁴ And he received the LORD’s forgiveness.

Therefore, beloved, bring your sins to the cross. All of them.

The cost of discipleship is great. But the cost of our redemption was far greater. Has a Father’s love ever borne so great a cost? Never!

And so we come to the questions I posed earlier: What will it take to remain a disciple of Jesus? And will I have to give up anything? Yes, you will have to hand over your sins to Jesus. And to remain a disciple requires regular helpings of God's Word. It also entails receiving his forgiveness in the Sacrament of his body and blood. Beloved, his table awaits!

May we continue to follow him no matter what the cost! In the name of Jesus: Ἀμήν.

Soli Deo Gloria!

Endnotes

¹See Revelation 13:8, NKJV.

²See John 19:30.

³One should not overlook Matthew 10:37, a parallel passage, in which Jesus 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.”** Arthur Just, in commenting on this verse, says, “Does Jesus really mean that we are to hate our father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, even our own soul? Matthew records the softer formulation that makes ‘hate’ correspond to ‘not love more than (Mt 10:37), i.e., we are not to love family ‘more than’ Jesus and his kingdom. This is, in fact, the meaning of ‘hate’ here, but Luke preserves the Semitic expression in all its hardness.” Arthur A. Just, Jr., *Luke 9:51-24:53*, vol 2 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997), pp. 580-581.

⁴See Psalm 51:4, ESV.