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15th Sunday after Pentecost
Sermons
September 5, 2010

LUKE 14:25 - 35 "THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP"

What is the cost of discipleship? What does it cost to follow after Jesus? What is the price to belong to Christ? Everything has a cost, a price, even that which is given.

Is freedom free? No, freedom is quite costly. Liberty and justice for all in this country has been paid for with blood, sweat, and tears. From 1776 to the present day millions of American's have given their lives so that their families and fellow citizens might live as a free people. American blood and tears have been shed so that you and I and all the idiots of our nation might have the freedom of religion, the freedom of speech, the freedom of the press, the freedom of peaceable assembly, the freedom to petition our government, and many others. The cost of freedom is great.

Is there a cost to marriage? Yes, a daily cost! Husband and wife must give up their independence, must endure all the bad habits, idiosyncrasies, and selfishness of each other day by day over a lifetime. Husband and wife must bear and forgive each others grievances and give their lives in service to one another. The cost of marriage is great. Is there a cost to being a parent? Time, energy, attention, emotion, money, and just about everything are taxed in service to your children. The cost of parenthood is great. Is there a cost to your daily vocation, to your daily work and service? Yes, your time, energy, thoughts, and skills for at least 40 hours a week. The cost of your daily vocation is great.

Yes just like everything else, there is a cost of discipleship; following after Jesus is not free. In fact being a disciple of Jesus Christ is more costly than anything else in two ways. Discipleship cost Christ Jesus everything and discipleship cost you everything.

Discipleship cost Christ Jesus everything and you nothing. Belonging to Christ Jesus as His forgiven disciple, following after Jesus as an heir of eternal life was a cost that Jesus bore and carried for you. Forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation were not free, but had to be bought by a price; the cost was Jesus' own body and Jesus' own blood given and shed for you! 1 Peter 1:18-19 reads, "knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot." And the explanation to the Second Article in the Catechism echoes these words saying, "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom

and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity.”

Further more believing, trusting, and following after Jesus as His disciple is not your work, choice, or act of your will combined with Jesus' work. Rather repentance and faith are completely the gifts of God for Jesus sake through the work of the Spirit in the Gospel. Scripture makes this explicit in the familiar words of St. Paul, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9)* and *“...no one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3)*. But the Gospels too make this clear; notice that no person ever makes themselves a disciple of Jesus, but that Jesus always calls and invites sinners to follow Him! Jesus is the one who forgives, heals, restores, and gives life; the people never do it for themselves!

Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James, and John to follow Him and be fishers of men. Jesus called and chose the Twelve to be His disciples and special witnesses and sent ones. Jesus called and chose the Seventy Two and sent them with His authority to proclaim the Good News. Jesus called sinners from the crowds of people who were flocking about Him to follow Him and trust in His Word. No one chose or decided to follow and belong to Jesus by their own will, strength, or reason.

Jesus has also called and chosen you to belong to Him and follow after Him as His disciple; He called you in baptism to be His disciple. Jesus said, *“All authority in heaven and upon the earth has been given to Me. Therefore as you go, make disciples of all the nations by baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, by teaching them to hold fast to all the things which I have commanded you; and I will be with you all the days until the completion of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20)*. And this means that Jesus has called you to die!

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book, *“The Cost of Discipleship”* writes, *“When Christ calls a man He bids him come and die.”* This my brothers and sisters is the cost that you and I must bear; our Lord Jesus died and so must we. We must follow after our Lord as He calls us; we must bear or carry our own cross and follow after Jesus.

25 And many crowds continued to journey with Him, and He turned and said to them, 26 “If someone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters yet and also his own life, he is not able to be My disciple. 27 Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me, he is not able to be My disciple. 28 For who from you wishing to build a tower does not first sit to count the cost, if he has enough to finish? 29 In order that lest he set its foundation and he is not able to finish all those looking begin to mock him 30 saying ‘ that this man began to build and he is not able to finish.’ 31 Or what king goes to a different king to gather for war not having first sat to consider if he is able with ten thousand to meet with twenty thousand coming against him? 32 But if not surely, yet while being far away he will send an embassy to question the terms for peace. 33 Therefore in this way everyone from you who does not say goodbye to all his possessions is not able to be My disciple. 34 Therefore salt is good; but if the salt loses its saltiness, with what will it be seasoned? 35 Neither for the earth nor for the dung heap is it fit, they cast it outside. The one having ears to hear let him hear.”

Our Lord Jesus spoke these words while on His journey to bear His cross for our forgiveness, life, and salvation; He spoke them to the crowds whom He was calling to be His disciples. They are words meant for us today, that make clear just how costly discipleship is. Following after Jesus costs us everything: our most intimate of relationships; our own lives; and all that we have.

Jesus uses some rather harsh language; He says that we are to “hate” wife, father, mother, children, brothers, sisters, and one’s own life. So does Jesus mean that we are to all become monks and nuns? Am I to divorce my wife, abandon my daughter, cut off relations with my mother, leave all of you behind, and sell all my belongings so that I can do the “real and great” work of the Lord- praying, studying, and chanting? Am I to bear my cross by beating my body and making life extremely uncomfortable (visions of monks beating their heads with bibles while chanting in Latin from Monty Python’s *The Holy Grail* come to mind)? Are you to do likewise? No!!!

Instead Jesus is emphasizing that His disciples must fear, love, and trust in Him above all things. No other person or thing is to come before or in between us and the Lord’s will for us. Our belonging to Christ, our following after Him is of first importance, more important than all relationships, more important than our own thoughts and desires, and more important than all that we might have. Remember earlier in Luke Jesus said that He had come not to bring peace, but division even amongst family members (Luke 12:49-53) and in Luke 8:21 Jesus said, “*My mother and My brothers are those who hear the Word of God and do it.*” A person is either with Christ or against Christ, there is no middle ground. And sometimes being with Christ means that you are in fact separated from your own family members, if they do not believe and follow after Christ.

Jesus is not calling us to be mean, cruel, and nasty to our family members; He is not calling us to abandon our human relationships and obligations so that we can be monks and nuns. But these human relationships and obligations are not to be our gods. Jesus strongly warns us through the word “hate” that our life, being, and purpose is not found in our closest friends and relatives, nor in ourselves, but only in following after Christ.

The idea of bearing or carrying one’s own cross is not fun, because dying is not fun; it is painful and difficult. It is easy to follow after Jesus with joy in good times, when all is well and happy in our lives, when we seem to be blessed with all the things we want. But when testing, trials, even persecution come upon us there is great temptation to go our own way. Crosses come in many forms: sickness and diseases; hard times; loss of loved ones; dealing with difficult people; and on and on. Neither you, nor me, nor any disciple of Jesus gets to choose what crosses we will bear, that is for the Father to decide just as it was His will for Jesus to bear the cross for us. Each day we must bear our crosses, each day Christ bids us to follow Him and die to sin and self.

We most often bear our own cross in the context of our daily life of service to others through our vocations as husband and wife, father and mother, pastor, teacher,

student, police officer, soldier, and so on. It is not easy to love and serve others, to do what is best for them; it is much easier to do what we want and desire. It is not easy to bear and endure the ugliness of others and often it does not seem worth it. Yet Christ calls us to love our neighbor as ourselves!

Jesus is not against capitalism, private property, or having things. But Jesus is against your possessions possessing you! Your life is not in the abundance of your earthly goods. Christ Jesus is your life. Christ Jesus is the prize worthy of far more than all the riches of this world. His body and blood are more precious than gold or silver; they give forgiveness and life to those who trust His Word and follow after Him. Disciples of Jesus are to use the earthly goods entrusted to them in the service of one's neighbor.

Last week during our congregational potluck I announced to those present the urgent need of our congregation as we bear together the cost of ministry and service to each other and our community. For the past three years Faith Lutheran Church has been helping us bear the cost of ministry in this place as we proclaim the love of God in Christ to each other and our families, friends, and neighbors. The people of Faith committed themselves to helping our congregation bear the cost for another three years. However, most recently they have been experiencing their own financial trials and have not been able to send us any support since March. This in turn has necessitated for the time being a reduction in my salary amongst other things so that we can make it till the end of the year.

But this also adds a greater cost and burden to all of you, disciples of Christ Jesus gathered in this place. Make no mistake God is calling us all to give generously of the possessions He has given to us to bear this cost together in love. Christ has called us to bear our cross and follow after Him and this is one of the crosses we bear together; this too is the cost of discipleship.

Is the cost worth it? Is loving our Lord first and hating all else worth it? Is taking up our cross and following after Jesus worth it? Is giving up the things we possess to belong to Jesus and be His disciple worth it?

The simple answer is yes. But don't simply take my word for it, listen to the Word of Christ Jesus our Lord who said, *"Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life"* (Luke 18:29-30). Jesus gave everything of Himself so that you might belong to Him as His disciple. Jesus went to Jerusalem and endured suffering and death on the cross for you! Jesus gave His body and shed His blood for the forgiveness of your sins, that you might have life and salvation trusting in His Word. Jesus has borne the cost of discipleship for you; today He bids you to follow Him and die, so that He might be your life, Amen!