

The Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 7-8, 2019
Luke 14:25-35

“The Cost of Discipleship”

Welcome back, everyone! Now that Labor Day has come and gone, the summer is giving way to fall, and with it, busier schedules for us all. People have returned from vacations, school is back in session, and the Blue and Yellow lines on Metro are up and running once again! Hallelujah! It goes without saying that there is a cost – a very big price tag – that goes with all the platform work for the Blue and Yellow line stations that’s been done over the summer. There is a cost that goes with education and learning: school supplies and clothes, tuition, lunch money, just to name a few. There is a cost involved to go away on vacation. There is a cost for everything. This weekend, we begin a new year of learning and growing in the Christian faith. We call this Kick-Off Sunday, and all of the educational opportunities in the life of our congregation kick off today or in the week ahead: Cross Exploration – our new Sunday morning children’s ministry, Discipleship 101 for those interested in membership in our congregation, Sunday and Midweek adult Bible classes, Confirmation classes, English as a Second Language classes, our Early Childhood Education Center’s ministry of learning for pre-school children. Is there a cost involved with all of these things? Yes, indeed! There are certainly expenses involved with providing these learning opportunities: materials, books, staff salaries. But there are other costs involved: time, preparation, and commitment. On this Kick-Off Sunday, Jesus talks about the cost of discipleship in today’s Gospel lesson and what it means to follow him as his disciple. This becomes the theme for preaching today. May the Lord’s rich and abundant blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word for Jesus’ sake.

Jesus’ call to discipleship in the Gospel lesson may strike us as harsh, even cruel: **“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... So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.”** (Luke 14:26). What in the world is Jesus talking about, and how are we to understand him? Jesus is steadily making his way toward Jerusalem and all that awaits him there: rejection, betrayal, suffering, and death upon the cross. All those **“great crowds [that] accompanied him”** (Luke 14:25) needed to know what was in store for Jesus, and if for him, then possibly for them as well. He was giving them fair warning about what would be out there on the horizon. Following Jesus, then or now, is not a promise of a sweet and easy life; that things will always go our way; that we will always have sunshine on our path. Jesus calls us to take up our cross and follow him, and bearing the cross for Jesus’ sake in our lives is going to look different for each one of us. Jesus tells would-be disciples that following him will not be convenient. It may well mean that we will have to make difficult decisions. Following Jesus may impact our relationships, even within our own family. What is important to us, how we view life, our priorities – all are seen through the cross of Christ. As Martin Luther once said: “A religion that gives nothing, costs nothing, and suffers nothing, is worth nothing.”

“Count the cost,” Jesus cautions us. Count the cost, just as someone who is building has to consider funding for the construction project. Count the cost, just as a ruler who is preparing for war has to consider available resources and boots on the ground over against what the other side can muster. Jesus’ purpose, as well as the purpose of this sermon today, is not to scare anyone away from the kingdom of God or from following Jesus, but to understand clearly the cost of discipleship. Paul the apostle is the author of today’s Epistle lesson (Philemon 1-21), a letter written from his prison cell. Paul was imprisoned for the sake of the Gospel, and eventually he would lay down his life for the Gospel. That was the cost of discipleship for Paul. But Paul willingly accepted this because he knew that Jesus had laid down his life for him, bearing Paul’s sins as well as ours in his own body on the tree of the cross. Can we

accept the cost of discipleship in our own lives, trusting that because Jesus has given his life for us, he is more than able to transform disappointment, suffering, and pain into blessing? Discipleship is more than just showing up on Sunday morning and checking the box. Discipleship is faithfully following Christ through the ups and downs of life; not only when we feel strong, confident, and courageous, but also when we feel weak, fearful, and uncertain. Discipleship is rooted in what God has done for us, not in what we can do for God. Discipleship is centered in God's never-failing love for us; his mercies which are new to us every day; his steadfast love which lasts forever. This moves us to a new obedience – not something that is lukewarm or half-hearted, but is what we hear in today's Old Testament lesson: **“loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days”** (Deuteronomy 30:20a). This is what the cost of discipleship means: life and love.

At the start of this new year of learning, this is a great time to make a fresh start in our life of discipleship. No more excuses about why you can't be in at least one Bible study, small group/huddle, or missional community. Jesus told Martha that there is only one thing that is needful (Luke 10:38-42), and Jesus himself is that one thing. Don't just drop off the kids for the Education Hour, and then head out to Starbucks or grocery shopping. We all lead very busy lives, but if we're too busy to be in God's Word, then we are too busy. Come and explore who Jesus is, how much he loves us, what he has done for us, and what he has to say to each of us in his Word. Come and find support, strength, and blessing in your journey of faith among your brothers and sisters in Christ. Consider the five mission practices and questions from *Joining Jesus on His Mission* that are really all about discipleship: 1) Seeking the kingdom/How did you see God at work in your life this week? 2) Hearing from Jesus/What has God been teaching you in his Word? 3) Talking with people/What kind of conversations are you having with people who don't know Jesus? 4) Doing good/What good can we do around here? and 5) Ministering through prayer/How can we help you in prayer?

In his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) wrote about cheap grace vs. costly grace:

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble, it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him.

Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock.

*Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son... and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us (*The Cost of Discipleship*, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. New York: Macmillan, 1976; pp. 47-48).*

May the Lord who loved us and gave his life for us so work in our hearts and minds that we may not fear the cost of discipleship, but rejoice that He has called us to be his disciples, all by his grace and for his glory. Through this, our lives will become a living witness to the Lord just like the psalmist wrote: **“He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither”** (Psalm 1:3). May God make it so for Jesus' sake. Amen.

