**Luke 14:25-33** September 29, 2019

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*Luke 14:25Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: 26“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. 27And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.*

*28Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? 29For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, 30saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ 31Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? 32If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. 33In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.”*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**“IF ANYONE COMES TO ME AND DOES NOT…”**

Maybe you remember this: a few years ago a billionaire made the headlines. He said that he paid less in taxes than his secretary. That gets us pretty excited, in a negative way. We picture someone just scraping by paying higher taxes than her boss so wealthy we couldn’t afford any little bit of his life – not the food, the housing, the vacations, probably not even the toilet paper! (Full disclosure: many news stories didn’t report that the billionaire actually said he paid a lower tax *rate* than his secretary.) [[1]](#endnote-1)

When asked about this, billionaires and corporations point out that they pay every penny the law requires. Which is true. The IRS watches them like a hawk.

When they say that, we realize that is about what all of us do to one degree or another. We all pay as little as we can. And with that realization most of us say, “Whatever!” and move on.

Which calls to mind what the people in our reading were trying to do.

But before we go further, I do have to say this: this past year in particular, I have become more and more conscious of how just about every time Jesus opens his mouth, he challenges me. He convicts me when it comes to my own behavior. If you take the time to actually read what Jesus said, Jesus will challenge you too.

In today’s encounter with Jesus there is something different from most Gospel readings. Usually the Gospels put us in the middle of an event, in a setting. Sometimes Jesus himself sets the stage, like for the Sermon on the Mount. Sometimes Jesus is responding to a situation, like last week when he was at that dinner, remember, and guests were taking the seats of honor. Sometimes Jesus is answering questions, like, “What is the greatest commandment?” But in today’s reading, Jesus and the crowds, the large crowds, were just walking along from unnamed point A to unnamed point B, when suddenly Jesus whirled around and gave them a speech. ***“Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said…”*** (25).

Several times in Jesus’ ministry when his popularity was reaching phenomenal levels, when his approval rating was approaching the 90% mark, at just that point he would turn around and say something challenging to the crowds following. His words would end up alienating many, if not most. It happened right after the feeding of the 5,000. A small stadium full of people, and after Jesus got done talking to them the next morning, only a handful remained.

Here in our reading, Jesus again had large crowds following him. But it seems like he just couldn’t stand success. He spontaneously blurted out three conditions of service that are bound to offend many. ***“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple… Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple”*** (26,27,33).

Didn’t he realize what he was doing? Why did Jesus push people away?

Following Jesus isn’t for the faint of heart. It isn’t for people who come along for the entertainment. Jesus isn’t for people who want to later in the day go home, hang up the coat, flop down on a comfy couch and say, “Jesus really had it going today!” Jesus isn’t for people who say, “I don’t have anything else going today. Why not?” He requires more of his followers. He requires believers.

**A. People** He requires people who have an otherwise decent spouse who says, “Me or Jesus” and Jesus demands that place. Jesus requires parents to put him in front of their children, even if they don’t want it. He requires us to make it plain to grown siblings where we stand with them even as they have over the years abandoned the faith they were brought up in. Jesus says, “I am first, every time.” ***“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother… he cannot be my disciple.”***

Now that word “hate” troubles us. Jesus told us that anybody who is even *angry* with his brother is a murderer. So we can be sure Jesus doesn’t want us to hate people. Many Bible-believing people who know a lot more than me have said that Jesus used a hyperbole, sort of an exaggeration. I believe, basically, they are right. Yet, Jesus meant to use the words he used. Following him is going to be a test of the heart for some. It will be heart-rending for others. Jesus puts a clear and sharp choice before his people. Let nobody, not even the dearest people in your life, get between you and your Savior.

**B. Comfort** The second duty assignment for his followers is to put him in front of comfort. ***“Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”*** Jesus’ cross is first and foremost the place where we are saved from our sins. But his cross is also an example of the cross his followers can expect.

We should expect troubles in this world. Having said that, we do not seek out troubles. Yet when they come we don’t gripe and complain about them. We have our eyes on a greater prize than the comforts of this world. When we declare the truth of God and it offends the values of the society around us, we will not be surprised that some want us to be quiet. We realize that speaking the truth of God’s word will cause some people to think less of us. We do not complain to God about these things because Jesus told us that these things would happen. ***“Anyone who does not carry his cross…”***

If you thought being a Christian is simply agreeing to be a nicer person, and/or saying “one nation under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance with special emphasis, or showing up when convenient—if that’s what being a Christian is, then you have taken up no cross. Jesus says, ***“He cannot be my disciple.”***

**C. Belongings** The third duty assignment Jesus gives is this: ***“Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.”***

What powerful words. The word here for “give up” is the same word as “to say goodbye to”. If you aren’t willing to kiss your belongings goodbye in the name of Jesus, you can’t be his disciple.

This takes the form of regular church offerings and using your time to clean the church, to count offerings, to promote missions. Willingness to give up everything includes taking that $10 you were saving for a rainy day, and instead giving it to someone in need. It includes taking the distractions that get in the way of God’s kingdom and putting them under severe restrictions, and if that doesn’t work, throw them in a garbage can.

Of course, ***“give up everything”*** brings questions. Can I buy a new car? Or maybe it should be a gently used one? Or a junker? Or a bicycle? We can’t insist on any of those necessarily, and we can’t rule any of those out either. Remember that some of the people who, humanly speaking, made Jesus’ ministry possible were wealthy people who sponsored him, but if they had given it all up, would not have been able to. Remember that the second time Jesus commissioned his disciples he said, *“[Before,] I sent you without purse, bag, or sandals… But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag”* (Luke 22:35-36).

We can see a pattern emerging. Jesus does not force poverty, discomfort or friendlessness upon us. But if there is any contradiction or competition between family, comforts, or belongings on the one hand, and our relationship with our Savior on the other, Jesus makes it clear which one needs to be shown the door. Otherwise ***“we cannot be his disciple.”***

As we go through Jesus’ list of things that we must be willing to sacrifice for him, we start to think of those billionaires and corporations and their taxes. We realize how them and their taxes is like us and God. We naturally try to find ways to give less to our God that we ought. We claim our deductions, find our extenuating circumstances, file for extensions. No, God. Not that. Not that!

There on the road, with thousands around him, Jesus turned around and told all to hear: “If you will not do such-and-such… then you can’t follow me.” I imagine that that crowd was silent for a few seconds. Then a few who were just along for the ride said, “Well, if he’s going to be that way about it…” A few of the more serious, too afraid to approach Jesus directly, asked the Peter or John, “Was he serious?” It was a heart-searching moment. Jesus wanted them asking themselves why they were out there on that dusty road with him. So he told them, ***“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it?... Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able… to oppose the one coming against him?”*** Sit down. Count the cost!

You know, it’s a mere formality to join a lot of churches. Some don’t require membership classes. Others maybe one or two afternoons. We generally require at least a dozen. And then, as if that weren’t enough, we ask people who want to become members to get up in front of the entire congregation and answer this question: *“Do you intend to continue steadfast in the true Christian faith, be diligent in the use of God’s Word and sacraments, and lead a godly life even to death?”* Isn’t that going overboard? I never really thought of it this way before, but isn’t that just what Jesus was saying out in the middle of that road? “You need to sit down and count what it will cost you to follow me!”

But one question remains. Why? Why did Jesus say this?

Obviously Jesus isn’t a politician grasping for popularity. Make such demands on followers is political suicide. Is he sore that people don’t appreciate what he is doing? Is he a domineering tyrant who wants to control every facet of their lives?

No Jesus is our Savior. He is carrying a cross we could never carry, the cross where he paid for all our sins of selfishness and self-centeredness, of living the life we want to live and helping others only insofar as it doesn’t inconvenience me too much. He is carrying that cross for the thousands with him out on that road and for you and me. He is winning the gift of forgiveness and heaven for free. He loves them and wants every single one of them in heaven with him, but he knows. He knows that as trouble for him increases, their numbers will decrease, until there will be only a couple left willing to stand at that cross on Calvary. Most would not be true disciples, and I am certain that added to his sorrows on the cross. Yet some did, and many more would.

May God strengthen us to be Jesus’ disciples through all the adversities of life!

The younger you are, the more likely you are—now, this is a good thing—the more likely you are to think of dying gloriously for Christ. It is not granted to many to do so. But those who do, serve a marvelous example that the rest of us who do not die gloriously might take up the cross and *live* gloriously for Christ.

By way of example, I would close with the story of a single monk who lived about 1,600 years ago, in the waning days of the Roman Empire. At that time, even though Christianity was the official religion, gladiators still fought to the death in Roman stadiums for entertainment. A certain monk named Telemachus was so troubled by this that he made a long journey on foot to Rome. There he attended one of the contests, and then jumped unarmed into the arena to stop the contest. The crowd was so angered that they stoned Telemachus to death on the spot. Yet all was not lost. When the emperor heard of this monk, his heart was so touched that these games were permanently outlawed.[[2]](#endnote-2)

Do we not know that this is what Christ has bought us for? Whether in a life cut short in a single sacrificial act, or a long life of service, is this not what Jesus meant when he turned to that happy-go-lucky crowd following him and said, “Take up your cross.” Amen.

1. https://money.cnn.com/2013/03/04/news/economy/buffett-secretary-taxes/index.html [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint\_Telemachus [↑](#endnote-ref-2)