

16 Pentecost Yr C, 4/09/2016
Lk 14:25-33
Rev. Garth Wehrfritz-Hanson

“Costly life”

Life is costly. One of the important and practical lessons that parents try to teach their children is that everything in life has a cost. In one way or another we need to count the cost. Jesus, in today’s gospel employs hyperbole, he exaggerates, he shocks his listeners in order to grab their attention and make his point that life is costly, following him is costly, therefore be prepared to count the cost before you become a disciple of Jesus. He’s telling all would-be disciples: “If you want to follow me know this; life is not going to be a bowl full of cherries; you’re not likely going to get rich quick. I’m not promising you health, wealth, fame and fortune. Rather, I’m promising you a life filled with personal sacrifices; of loving and serving the poor, the outcast, the widow, the orphan, the needy, those who are forgotten and neglected by the rich and famous. So be prepared to count the cost of following me. Life is not necessarily going to be successful and easy. Rather, it is going to have a lot of challenges and you could even end up losing your life on a cross. Are you prepared to count the cost?”

Jesus’ words were hard for that crowd who first heard him, and those words are still hard for us to hear today. In Luke, Jesus says you have to hate your family members and yes, even your own life if you’re going to follow Jesus. Now that word hate is hard for us to hear. We cannot interpret that word literally here. Rather, it is intended to be taken as hyperbole, as an exaggeration in order to make an important point. What Jesus means here, I think is stated more accurately in Matthew’s Gospel, in chapter ten, verse thirty-seven, 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.” So here in Luke then, I think we can interpret the word “hate” not literally to mean to despise or reject or avoid at all costs or even to

destroy. No! Rather, I think we can interpret the word “hate” here to mean to love less than. So then, to follow Jesus means to love him more than family members; to love our parents and children less than loving Jesus. Of course I realize that loving family less than Jesus can be very hard. I don’t believe loving family less than Jesus means that we have to abandon them altogether and not care and provide for them. No! Rather, I think it means that over and above our loving family, Jesus may be calling us into a way of life and service that will involve sacrifices not just for ourselves personally, but also for family members, since our ultimate loyalty is to the LORD.

Here are a couple examples of that costly discipleship. It is told of Queen Elizabeth that when she was a small girl, she was forbidden to do something which she wanted to do. Like any child she was angry. She said, “I am a princess and I will do what I like.” King George the Fifth, her grandfather, was there, “My dear,” he said, “you *are* a princess and that is the one reason why, all your life, you will never be able to do as you like.”

It is so with the Christian. The cost of following Christ is the abandonment of our own wishes and the complete acceptance of His. But this submission is not the broken submission of a slave to a master, or of a subject to a tyrant; it is the submission of love.¹

Jesus’ call to costly discipleship can have surprising and unexpected implications for one’s life, as well as implications for family relationships, as the following story illustrates.

Pastor and Professor Fred Craddock recalls preaching in a university church...some years ago, when a young woman came up after the service. [He] had preached on Mark 1, the call of the disciples. She came up and said she wanted to talk with [Pastor Craddock] and said, “I’m in med school here, and that sermon clinched what I’ve been struggling with for some time.”

“What’s that?”

“Dropping out of med school.”

“What do you want to do that for?”

She said she was going to work in the Rio Grande Valley. She said, “I believe that’s what God wants me to do.” She quit med school, went to the Rio Grande Valley, sleeps under a piece of tin in the back of a pickup truck, and teaches little children while their parents are out in the field. She dropped out of med school for this, and her folks back in Montana are saying, “What in the world happened?”

And [Pastor Craddock] was saying to her, “Well, now, I was just preaching, I didn’t mean to, you know.”² You never know what people will do once they’ve counted the cost and followed Jesus.

That med student was prepared to count the cost and follow Jesus. After telling us to love him more than our family members, Jesus goes on to tell two parables about planning a building project and preparing an army. Once again Jesus is saying: “Count the cost.”

Every once in a while you may have heard of exactly what Jesus is talking about here. Sometimes in the news you may have learned about a contractor going belly-up because they failed to plan their building project wisely before they got started. It ended up costing way more than they had planned for, and so the building was either not completed or another contractor was hired to complete the project. Of course the humiliation of failing at such a project can badly damage a contractor’s reputation; even to the extent that it can put them out of business.

So it is with your life and mine. Count the cost of following Jesus. Life is costly, bearing your cross, sacrifice and loving service is not easy. However it is worth it! For that, thanks be to God. Amen.

1 Wm. Barclay, *And Jesus Said: A Handbook on the Parables of Jesus* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970), pp. 206-207.

2 Fred B. Craddock, edited by Mike Graves & Richard F. Ward, *Craddock Stories* (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2001), pp. 52-53.