

Sunday September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022

Luke 14:25-33  
“Meeting the High Price”

A man comes home from church with two black eyes. His wife takes one look at him and exclaims, "how in the world did you get two black eyes at church!?" "Well," the man answers, "When we stood up to pray, i noticed that the woman in front of me had the back of her dress tucked in to her pantyhose. I didn't want to embarrass her by telling her, so I reached forward and pulled it out. She turned around and punched me in the eye!"

"That explains one black eye" said his wife, " so how did you get the other one?" "I thought she must have wanted it there so I put it back!" Crazy things can happen at church. But why you are here today? I would like to believe that you are here for the preaching. Maybe the worship team would like to believe that you are here for the music. But we all have been around long enough to know that may not be the case.

There maybe one man or woman here who is in attendance because their spouse made them come. Maybe it is payback for their attending an event they didn't want to go to. Over the years I have know young men and women who came to church hoping against hope that he will meet a special someone. There are lots of reasons aren't there? But of all the possible reasons why you are here this morning, let us assume, just as a kind of working hypothesis, that you are all here because you are trying to follow Jesus.

In all honesty you could have slept late – lots of people do. You could have gone to the lake or played golf; its a good day for that. But perhaps you are here in worship because you are trying, in your own little corner of the world, to follow Jesus, to be a disciple. And it is my job to help you do just that...primarily by exposing you to God's instructive word in scripture. But wait until you get a load of today's gospel lesson!

Hmm. Not exactly a “church growth” text, is it? I can imagine your Pulpit Committee nearly six years ago meeting with me to come to serve. Imagine Jay or Tom or one of the others on the committee asking me “Darrell, tell us something of your understanding of church membership.” What if I responded “The first rule is you must hate your father and mother, your wife and children, your brothers and sisters—yes, even your own life.

Then you must be prepared to die for the cause. As Jesus has said, anyone who is not prepared to give up EVERYTHING cannot be a member.” “Uh-huh. Well, thank you, Darrell. We will get back to you as we continue our search.” Sure, they would! Is what was described here the kind of church that would appeal to you? A few, perhaps.

But most of us would be drawn to something more in the vision of Norman Rockwell, a third grade Sunday School class full of little girls with blond pigtails and little boys with slingshots in their back pockets, all of them bowing their heads in prayer; families lined up in a comfortable pew in a sanctuary graced by the spectrum of light filtered through stained glass; a graying, gentle pastor who is a friend to everyone, and would rather die than ever hurt or offend. That is what appeals to most people.

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Then we hear Jesus: unless we hate our families, carry our crosses, and give up all our possessions, we cannot be his disciples. So why don't we all – you and me both – just turn in our resignations right now? Because clearly, none of us has what it takes.

As one commentator says, “If Jesus were in charge of an average congregation, I figure there would be about four people left there on Sunday mornings, and chances are those four would be fooling themselves. Jesus would greet newcomers by saying, ‘Are you absolutely sure you want to follow this way of life? It will take everything you have. It has to come before everything else that matters to you.’” Jesus continues.

Plenty of people have launched out on this faith journey without counting the cost, and as you can see, they are not here anymore. The other thing is, if you succeed – if you really do follow me – it will probably get you killed. Why don't you go home and think it over? I would hate for you to get in over your head.” What are we dealing with here? How are we to understand the harshness of what Jesus is saying?

The first thing is to look at the context. The passage starts out by saying, “Large crowds were traveling with Jesus...” This itinerant rabbi had become popular, and suddenly, like a rock star, the groupies had begun to gather. They had heard about his preaching and teaching; they had especially heard about his miracles; they wanted to get close to this incredible character and experience the unusual energy that seemed to surround him.

Goose bumps! Ooh! Some of the more serious ones no doubt thought that perhaps this indeed was the Messiah the nation had longed for, the one who would deliver them all from the hand of the Roman legions. One way or the other, time to Party...Party!

But Jesus is less than encouraging. He tells them their high hopes may be writing a check that in reality they cannot cash. There is more to this disciple business than meets the eye. He suggests that they go home, and do some serious thinking about whether or not they are ready for commitment. To tell you the truth, I suspect many who heard him that day were as puzzled by what he said as you and I are.

What is all this about hating our parents, our children, even our very lives? The best way to understand it is to realize that Jesus was using a figure of speech we do not use anymore. In Aramaic, the speaking language Jesus used, the word we translate as “hate” has nothing to do with an emotion. It was a way of expressing priorities – so if I say, “I love the Toronto Blue Jays and hate the Yankees” (or vice versa), it would not mean I feel hostile toward one thing or the other, but simply that one of those was my first choice.

In Jesus' day, the way you stated a preference was by pairing two things, and saying you loved one and hated the other. It had nothing to do with feelings. The issue here was priorities. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. He knows what lies ahead. With the benefit of 20/20 hindsight, Luke knows even more. “When he wrote his gospel, Christians were already being persecuted for following Jesus. To have a Christian in the family was dangerous for everyone, because the Romans were thorough.

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If they found one believer in a household, they would arrest everyone, so it really was true that turning toward Jesus meant turning away from your family, whether you wanted to or not. Once you made following Jesus your first priority, everything else fell by the wayside – not because God took it away from you but because that is how the world works.”

YOU make the choice.

A while back, Will Willimon, Dean of the Chapel down at Duke University, got a call from an upset parent, a VERY upset parent. “I hold you personally responsible for this,” he said. “Me?” Will asked. The father was hot, upset because his graduate school bound daughter had just informed him that she was going to chuck it all (“throw it all away” was the way the father described it) and go do mission work with the Presbyterians in Haiti.

“Isn’t that absurd!” shouted the father. “A BS degree in mechanical engineering from Duke and she’s going to dig ditches in Haiti.” “Well, I doubt that she’s received much training in the Engineering Department here for that kind of work, but she’s probably a fast learner and will probably get the hang of ditch-digging in a few months,” Will said. “Look,” said the father, “this is no laughing matter. You are completely irresponsible to have encouraged her to do this. I hold you personally responsible,” he said.

As the conversation went on, Dr. Willimon pointed out that the well-meaning but obviously unprepared parents were the ones who had started this ball rolling. They were the ones who had her baptized, read Bible stories to her, took her to Sunday School, let her go with the Presbyterian Youth Fellowship to ski in Vail. Will said, “You’re the one who introduced her to Jesus, not me.” “But all we ever wanted her to be was a Presbyterian,” said the father, meekly. Hmm.

One of the keys to understanding scripture, especially difficult passages like our lesson today, is to remember who is speaking, and what we know of him or her from previous encounters. Here our speaker is Jesus, one we have come to know as caring and compassionate, one who goes out of his way to be welcoming, even to those whom society would shun. Suddenly, we are confronted with words that sound for all the world as if he wants to push us away, to erect a wall of expectation too high to scale. How should we understand it?

I think this is just a matter of Jesus refusing to lead us on. He will not lie to us, refusing to make his way sound easier than it is. No false pretenses. Discipleship makes a difference; it makes a difference in the way we live; it makes a difference in the way we die.

You may recall a name from history, William Lloyd Garrison, the crusading abolitionist of the early 19th century. Garrison was once complimented on the distinctiveness and fineness of his handwriting, which at one time had been so poor as to be almost indecipherable. His reply to the compliment was, “I set to work to improve it when I became a Christian, for I resolved that I would make my Christianity reach into every detail of my life.”

“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.” Admirer? Yes. Disciple?

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No. Discipleship can cost all that we have, all that we love, all that we are. As I say, that is less God's doing than our own – we, after all, are the ones who set our own priorities. The danger of discipleship is that it changes us. It changes us. Discipleship might mean leaving hearth and home for service somewhere on the other side of the globe. It could mean a ministry in a dangerous neighborhood of an inner city.

It could mean participating in a work trip in the third world next year to help Christian brothers and sisters who have only limited resources themselves. It could mean cooking meals for the hungry or helping out on a Thursday at the Caring Cupboard in the cause of helping the hungry. It could mean something as simple as making certain you are here for Sunday service from week to week because you know that the Greek word we translate as disciple really means “learner.” Being a disciple makes a difference in the way we live.

Fred Craddock one morning, told a story from the early years of his ministry in Custer City, Oklahoma, a town of about 450 souls. There were four churches there, a Methodist church, a Baptist church, a Nazarene church, and a Christian church (where Fred served). Each had its share of the population on Wednesday night, Sunday morning, and Sunday evening. Each had a small collection of young people, and the attendance rose and fell according to the weather and whether it was time to harvest the wheat.

But the most consistent attendance in town was at the little café where all the pickup trucks were parked, and all the men were inside discussing the weather, and the cattle, and the wheat bugs, and the hail, and the wind, and is there going to be a crop. All their wives and sons and daughters were in one of those four churches. The churches had good attendance and poor attendance, but the café had consistently good attendance, better attendance than some of the churches. They were always there – not bad men, but good men, family men, hard-working men.

Fred says the patron saint of the group that met at the café was named Frank. Frank was seventy-seven when they first met. He was a good, strong man: a pioneer, a rancher and farmer, and a prospering cattle man too. He had been born in a sod house; he had his credentials, and all the men there at the café considered him their patron saint. “Ha! Old’ Frank will never go to church.”

Fred says, “I met Frank on the street one time. He knew I was a preacher, but it has never been my custom to accost people in the name of Jesus, so I just was shaking hands and visiting with him, but he took the offensive. He said, “I work hard, I take care of my family and I mind my own business. Far as I’m concerned, everything else is fluff.” You see what he told me? “Leave me alone, I’m not a prospect.”

I didn’t bother Frank. That’s why the entire church, and the whole town were surprised, and the men at the café church were absolutely bumfuzzled when old Frank, seventy-seven years old, presented himself before me one Sunday morning for baptism. I baptized Frank. Some of the talk in the community was, “Frank must be sick. Guess he’s scared to meet his maker.

They say he’s got heart trouble. Going up there and being baptized, well, I never thought old Frank would do that, but I guess when you get scared...” All kinds of stories.

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Dr. Craddock goes on: “We were talking the next day after his baptism, and I said, ‘Uh, Frank, you remember that little saying you used to give me so much: “I work hard, I take care of my family, I mind my own business?” He said, “Yeah, I remember. I said that a lot.” I said, “You still say that?” He said, “Yeah.”

I said, “Then what’s the difference?” He said, “I didn’t know then what my business was.” And so we come full circle. As we began this morning, I asked why you were here. I hope it is because you know what your business is, that your priorities are straight, or if they are not, you KNOW they are not, but you want them to be. If So, good! You have come to the right place.

The danger of discipleship is simply this – it changes you. Suddenly, you see the world through new eyes, the eyes of Jesus. You see needs and you want to fill them; you see hurts and you want to heal them. The danger of discipleship – it changes you, and keeps on changing you...for now and always.