

Is It Worth It?  
Luke 14:25-35

September 4, 2016

16<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost

Becky and I went car shopping last Friday on my day off. Both of our cars have well over 100,000 miles so it's time to start looking. I started to get that funny feeling in the pit of my stomach. It's the same feeling I had a few years ago when we were house shopping. The funny feeling comes from looking at a nice car and mulling over the answers two questions. First, can I afford it? And, second, is it worth it? You might ask yourself the same questions before a major purchase. If the item isn't worth anything, then you are not going to invest much in it. But if something is really worth it, then you are going to really try hard to afford it, even if it means giving up some things or doing without other things in order to acquire it. One thing is for certain: you really have to count the cost carefully and evaluate the value thoroughly before you buy anything important.

In our Gospel for today, Jesus talks about "counting the cost" and "evaluating the value" first before anything else is done. He gives two examples. First, he talks about building a tower. A man would be crazy not to count the cost of building it first. Otherwise, he would lay a foundation, run out of funds, and not be able to complete the structure. He would then be mocked and ridiculed by his friends.

Second, Jesus talks about a king who goes off to war against another king. He would be foolish not to consider whether it was worth it to lead his army of 10,000 troops into battle against the other king's army of 20,000 troops. If he is not able to win such a battle, then he better send a delegation to ask for terms of peace.

But Jesus is not talking about building towers or fighting wars. He's not giving us advice for buying cars or houses. Jesus is talking about the cost of being His disciple. The same two questions apply to this. Can you afford it? And, is it worth it?

These questions may be a bit shocking in this context. Many believe that following Jesus costs us nothing and only affects us in positive ways such as making us feel better when we go to church or giving us what we want or need when we pray. Many are willing to follow Jesus – on their terms. In our text, Jesus is saying, "No, you'll follow Me on My terms – or not at all."

For example, people will say, "Jesus, I will be glad to follow you. But my family always comes first." Jesus says, "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." Physical family relationships are less important in the Kingdom of God than they are outside of it for we have been placed in a new family – the family of God – to whom we owe greater loyalty than to our biological families. Jesus uses a bit of hyperbole to describe it. We are to love him so greatly that our love to others, even our biological families, is to seem like hate in comparison.

Or people will say, "Jesus, I will be glad to follow You. But if following You ever causes me any difficulty, inconvenience, pain, shame, embarrassment or persecution, then I'm out of here." (People may not actually SAY that but they seem to act that way.) We expect being a Christian and following Jesus to be easy and pain free. But Jesus says, "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple." Pain is a part of the program. The way of Jesus caused Him rejection, ridicule, pain and suffering which culminated in crucifixion on a cross. If we are following Jesus faithfully, those things will be part our lives as well.

Or people will say, "Jesus, I will be glad to follow you. But if this ever costs me anything – if you ever ask me for money or if this ever costs me my stuff, then forget about it." (Again, people may not actually SAY that but they seem to act that way.) We feel we have a right to certain creature comforts in this country and that we shouldn't have to be uncomfortable or give up our fun. But Jesus says, "So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple." Our wealth and possessions may be gone at any moment and we, as disciples, must be ready and willing to let them go.

Let's be honest. These are difficult words from our Lord. We wish that Jesus hadn't said these things or that we could just ignore His words. But then again I wish the stickers on the car windows had cheaper prices or that I could just ignore them all together and drive away without paying anything. But I couldn't do that with the cost of cars and we can't do that with the cost of discipleship. Following Jesus comes with a high cost. Is it worth it?

A lot of people would say, "No, it's not worth it." We might be willing to pay the price for earthly gain. We might ignore our families for the sake of a promotion and raise at our job. We might be willing to endure suffering and pain to lose weight or get into shape. We might be willing, as I said last week, to give up some minor purchases or pleasures if it means we get to buy something really big like a cabin, boat, or camper. But

to pay this high cost for religious reasons? Many would laugh and say it's not worth it. Their behavior shows that opinion.

But people like that (and even some Christians) fail to understand what being a disciple is all about. It's not some sort of religious or moral exercise. It is something that is truly worth everything and more.

Being a disciple of Jesus means a connection to the Creator of the universe and having His power in your life. It means being in a right relationship with Him through the forgiveness of sins and being able to lead a guilt free and peaceful life because of it. It means that, rather than wandering around and looking for meaning in life, you have a purpose and goal in life. You know where you've been and where you are going for, although you don't know what the future holds, you do know Who holds the future. You are following the way to everlasting life.

And here is where it is really worth it. Disciples of Jesus are headed to heaven to experience life the way God had always intended for it to be in the Garden of Eden – free from evil and sin and full of only goodness and blessing. Disciples of Jesus will live in the direct presence of Jesus and with all loved ones who have died in the faith – parents, children, spouses, family members. The book of Revelation describes what people in heaven will experience there. It says, "Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." (Revelation 7:15-17)

Can you even begin to imagine that? It is all the joy, happiness, love, peace, and satisfaction that we seek here in created things and may possess for a short time, but magnified thousands of times in quality, quantity, and duration. Disciples of Jesus will have everything they want or need – and even more – for an eternity. There is nothing that this world offers that can remotely compare with this.

Now, tell me: is THAT worth it? Yes, it is. But, in counting the cost, can we afford it? No, we can't. The admission to a holy heaven occupied by a holy God and the saints – God's holy people – is holiness. We not only sin in our thoughts, our words, and our actions, but our very nature has been corrupted by sin. We not only do not follow Jesus as disciples, but, because of our sin, we do not want to follow Him but we go the other way.

But we do know Someone who CAN afford it and will pay our admission for us and that's Jesus Christ. Jesus left His Father in heaven, renounced all that He had on earth, and literally bore a cross. There, He paid your debt with His own blood and earned forgiveness for all of your sins which were blocking your way to following Him as a disciple. At the tomb, God stamped His approval on Jesus' sacrifice by raising Him from the dead and opened up the way for us and all people to follow to everlasting life.

Jesus has made you His disciple, not because of your faithful effort to do so, but by His faithful gifts which empower you to follow Him. In your baptism, Jesus chose you and set you on the path of discipleship. Whenever you fall off the path and stray, Jesus calls you back by virtue of your baptism to repent and be forgiven.

In the Word of God – the Bible – Jesus guides you along the path of discipleship. As the Scriptures say, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." (Psalm 119:105) The Word of God will help you see the wrong ways that do not follow Jesus and avoid them. The Word of God will show the right ways that follow Jesus and take them.

Through the Lord's Supper, Jesus nourishes us and empowers us for the path of discipleship. His own body and blood, with the bread and the wine, feed us with the forgiveness which He won on the cross and strengthens us for the journey to everlasting life.

Does this mean to be a disciple is then easy? No. There are constant temptations to turn from following Him: conflicts in priorities with family and friends, suffering, problems with material goods. We are totally dependent on His grace and eagerly receive that every chance we have in His Word and Sacraments to keep us close to Him. And we trust in His promise to finally bring us to the completion of our journey. We confess along with St. Paul, "And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." (Philippians 1:6)

There's no need to have a funny feeling in your stomach when making a major purchase. Simply determine the value – how much it's worth to you. Count the cost – see if you have enough money. Then make your determination. Likewise, there's no need to have a funny feeling in your stomach when considering being a disciple of Jesus. Understand the eternal worth of being His disciple. Trust that He has paid the cost by dying on the cross. Let nothing hinder you or get in the way. Follow Him to everlasting life in heaven. Amen.