

## Counting the Cost

Luke 14:25-33

Crossroads Christian Church

Jeremiah 18:1-11

Sep. 8, 2013 Pent 15C

We've all had experience on how one thing leads to another, then another, then another. You have a dirty window, and you wash it. Now, the others look dirty, so you wash them. That means washing the curtains, of course. So after that, enough sunlight comes through that you see the dust, so you clean the rest of the house. And then you begin to wonder, wouldn't new countertops really look nice in the kitchen?

It's important to plan ahead, to count the cost, to have a clear idea of what you're in for when you start a project. When we sign up for a car loan, the law requires that we be shown what our payments will be, what our interest rate is, and what the total cost of the interest will be. We need to know what we're signing up for. Part of the tragedy of the recession that we're recuperating from is that it was started by the housing bubble, by lenders aggressively selling mortgages to people who couldn't afford them, who couldn't count the cost, and when those mortgages went sour, people were evicted, the lending institutions fell into debt, and the rest of the economy fell apart, too. And all because people

signed off on those pieces of paper describing their mortgage, and thought, "Nah, that'll never happen to me."

Today's Gospel story is a lot like that piece of paper that spells out what the costs of a commitment might be. It's not an easy passage. It's not a nice warm and fuzzy feel-good passage. In some ways, it's not any more fun to read than those loan warning messages. But we don't just accept Jesus as Savior, we accept him as Lord. And that means we have to pay attention to what he says, even when we're not comfortable with it.

First of all, let's put it into context. Jesus is still in Galilee, still healing, still preaching, still being idolized like a rock star by many, and regarded as a flimflam man by others. Here's the important thing. Things are heating up. Conflicts that have been just below the surface are bubbling up. Jesus is getting ready to go to Jerusalem, to the religious, civil and political heart of the nation. The crowd is enthusiastic, and ready to follow him. But do they know what they're getting into?

Fred Craddock describes the challenge well. (Interpretation, Luke, p. 181) "Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, but what is the nature of the journey? Is it a funeral procession? Apparently only Jesus has seriously faced the issue of his death; the Twelve certainly have not yet

grasped it. Is it a march? Very likely some think so, investing a good deal of emotion in imagining the projected clash: Galilee versus Jerusalem, peasants versus power, laity versus clergy, Jews versus Romans, Jesus versus the establishment. Is it a parade? Obviously, the crowd thinks so, oblivious to any conflict, any price to pay, any cross to bear. The crowds swell; everybody loves a parade. What does Jesus have to say to hasty volunteers? In sum, his word is, Think about what you are doing and decide if you are willing to stay with me all the way."

With Craddock's words in mind, let's go back to the text. If you were paying attention to Jesus' first statement, you might have gotten whiplash, or at least done a double-take. "'Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.'" Hate parents? Spouse? Children? Come on, this sounds like a cult leader, not Jesus. Didn't Jesus say "love your neighbor," didn't Jesus say, "Love your enemy?" So why hate those closest to you? It just doesn't fit. Craddock explains it by saying "'to hate' is a Semitic expression meaning to turn away from, to detach oneself from." Eugene Peterson's translation, *the Message*, puts it this way. "Anyone who comes to me but refuses to let go of father, mother, spouse, children, brothers, sisters -

yes, even one's own self! - can't be my disciple." Again, Fred Craddock says, "What is demanded of disciples, however, is that in the network of the many loyalties in which all of us live, the claim of Christ and the gospel not only takes precedence, but, in fact, redefines the others. This can and will necessarily involve some detaching, some turning away." Anybody who grew up in a parsonage probably remembers that it was tough having to share your parent with the church, when other people's needs took priority over yours.

Jesus goes on to talk about "taking up your cross," "Anyone who won't shoulder his own cross and follow behind me can't be my disciple." More tough words, and probably confusing to most of his followers, including his own disciples. In light of the crucifixion and resurrection, we know a little more about what they mean. We're grateful that we have religious freedom; that we aren't persecuted for our faith, but we know that it hasn't always been that way. When Thomas Jefferson wanted first Virginia and then the new nation to have religious freedom, he faced huge opposition from the established churches of the colonies, then the states. It was a radical idea. All the other countries had state churches, why shouldn't we? Many thought that Jefferson was an atheist. Others called him a Muslim—sound familiar? But Jefferson was influenced not only by his own

Enlightenment philosophy, but also by those believers, Christians and Jews, who came to this country because they were persecuted back in Europe. His idea finally won out, and we live where we can practice our faith without fear of persecution.

However, although we have it good here, the dangers of being Christian in a violent world have not passed.

Here's a quote from Wikipedia: "According to Pope Benedict XVI, Christians are the most persecuted group in the contemporary world. The Holy See has reported that over 100,000 Christians are violently killed annually because of some relation to their faith. According to the World Evangelical Alliance, over 200 million Christians are denied fundamental human rights solely because of their faith."

(unquote) So, Take up your Cross can mean something today, in our troubled world.

Back to the text: Jesus goes on to give two brief parables. Here they are in The Message: "Is there anyone here who, planning to build a new house, doesn't first sit down and figure the cost so you'll know if you can complete it? If you only get the foundation laid and then run out of money, you're going to look pretty foolish. Everyone passing by will poke fun at you: 'He started something he couldn't finish.' "Or can you imagine a king going into battle against

another king without first deciding whether it is possible with his ten thousand troops to face the twenty thousand troops of the other? And if he decides he can't, won't he send an emissary and work out a truce?" Again, Jesus is saying, "don't go off half-cocked. Know what you're getting into. Plan carefully, and like the Boy Scouts say, "Be Prepared."

Jesus concludes with these words: "Simply put, if you're not willing to take what is dearest to you, whether plans or people, and kiss it good-bye, you can't be my disciple. Salt is excellent. But if the salt goes flat, it's useless, good for nothing. Are you listening to this? Really listening?"

Tough words, challenging words, but they are still words that bring life. They call us to a real commitment to God and to Christ, a real commitment to reach out in love toward God and neighbor.

But the important thing to remember is that we do not walk the road alone, that Christ walked ahead of us, and Christ walks with us. The road that led to Jerusalem and Golgotha also led to the Upper Room and the Empty Tomb. Jesus shows us that we must count the cost, but that the reward is more than worth whatever the cost may be. Amen.

## Prayer: Concerns (bold plus cards)

### Silent prayer

Eternal God our Potter: you come to us before we come to you.

You send your Heart, Jesus Christ, to us before our hearts  
are turned to you.

You send your Spirit to us, when our spirits wander far from you.

You set a Table for us, when our souls are hungry, when our hearts are empty.

Eternal God, in spite of how much you love us, often we count the cost of discipleship and come up short. We have let other things get in the way of serving you. Yet still you forgive, and give us ever new chances to serve you faithfully. Help us, O God, to be faithful even when it costs us and challenges us. Help us to be loyal to those around us, but most of all to you.

Because you called us to love, we pray for others. We pray for young people back in school and for their teachers. We pray for students in college and higher education.

We pray for those who serve us and protect us—those in the military, the police and firefighters, EMTs, and others who put themselves on the line for us. We remember also those are hurting....

Communion: Today, Jeremiah used the image of a potter. Have you had the opportunity to watch an artist at work? Perhaps you've watched as a painter transformed an empty canvas into a thing of beauty, or a potter creating a vessel. Sometimes an artist, or a potter, will describe the process of creation as releasing that which is hidden on the canvas or blocked in the clay. Perhaps that's a good metaphor for our gathering at the table. As we participate in the bread and the cup, that which is already inside us is released by our loving God, in the power of God'