

September 4, 2022
Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Luke 14:25-35 (Deuteronomy 30:15-20)

THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Our text for meditation today comes from the Gospel according to St Luke, the 14th chapter which you heard read earlier.

In our text Jesus details the radical demands and unconditional nature of being His disciple. His demands sound extreme and even shocking.

1. You must hate your family.
2. Hate your own life.
3. And bear your own cross.

Sitting here in the safety of the Nave of the church, perhaps these demands of discipleship sounds *do-able* if you absolutely had to. But the truth is, your spirit may be willing, but your flesh is extremely weak. (cf: Matthew 26:41) You cannot keep any of God's commands or do any of Jesus demands as perfectly as you need to earn your salvation. Our Gospel text this morning is *not* about what you can do – but about what Christ Jesus has already done on your behalf.

In our text, Jesus is on His way to hand Himself over into death on Calvary's cross. He might not be popular with the Jewish religious leaders, but at this point of His ministry, great crowds are following Him as He slowly travels to Jerusalem. Not everyone who is following desires to be a disciple. Some are following because they are curious. Others want to be entertained. Still others wished to be disciples but have no idea what it requires. So Jesus tells them. He says you must:

- Hate your family.
- Hate your own life.
- Bear your own cross.

The word *hate* sounds harsh to our ears, especially when placed up against the 4th Commandment: *"You shall honor your father and mother."* We know at other times Jesus has commanded us to *love* our enemies and *love* our neighbor as ourselves. (cf: Luke 6:27, 10:27) So, before you panic, I need to tell you that Jesus is using the word *hate* metaphorically – not literally. This hating is not the same as having enmity or animosity toward someone – but rather rejecting the lesser thing for the greater. Like in the Old Testament when the Lord God speaks through His prophet Malachi saying:

"... I have loved Jacob³ but Esau I have hated..." (Malachi 1:2–3)

God rejected the older twin brother Esau as the lesser when He chose him to serve his younger brother, Jacob, as the greater. (cf: Engelbrecht, The Lutheran Study Bible, 1545) Or like in the book of Genesis where Moses records that Jacob loved Rachel but hated Leah. (Genesis 29:17–31) Jacob was rejecting the lesser for the greater. He loved the beautiful Rachel greater than he loved the less attractive Leah.

In context, Jesus is not commanding you to abandon and despise your loved ones. The bonds of loved ones are the strongest of all human social bonds, but even those bonds can be broken and twisted into hatred and death. These bonds are temporal, unlike the eternal bond you have with your Savior.

Now, if the day comes that your loved one demands that you place them before Jesus, or choose between them and Jesus – indeed – choose life in Christ to whom you were bound to in Baptism. His bond is eternal. If your loved ones demand you be unfaithful to Jesus, or to make any other person, place, or thing more important than Jesus – choose life in Christ. There is no middle ground. Jesus cannot and will not be second best. If it comes down to a choice, you must love Jesus and hate your family, even hate your own life. Your health and life are not your highest good. Jesus is. If you wish to follow Jesus, nothing dare come before Him in your life.

Hate your family.

Hate your own life.

And bear your own cross.

The two parables in our text explain it further. You must analyze the cost of everything before going forward. You certainly would not begin a building project if you did not have the funds to complete the project. You would risk being the laughing stock of the community. If you were a king contemplating going into battle, you would not just dive headlong into war without studying whether you had a chance to win the war or not. If you charge into battle without deliberation, you risk defeat and humiliation.

So it is with the cost of discipleship. You must consider the cost. If you do not fear, love, and trust in Christ above all things, you cannot be Jesus disciple. If you cannot give up the worldly things you love, the lesser for the greater, you cannot be His disciple. His disciple must be prepared to give up anything and everything if God calls for it. Even bearing your own cross unto death.

Today we tend to soften the definition a bearing one's cross. We refer to it as something that is a difficult responsibility or burden that someone must handle on their own. But those who are listening to Jesus know exactly what it means to bear your own cross. In those days one bears his own cross only in preparation for his own crucifixion and death. To take up the cross and come after Jesus means to submit yourself to Him and accept the most vile humiliation and persecution, even unto death because of your confession of faith and trust in Christ. To follow Jesus means to open yourself up to the contempt of the world, rejecting the lesser thing for the greater, disavowing the temporal for the eternal.

Jesus does not call the crowds, and you and me, to renounce our family, bear our crosses, and come after Him because He needs our help. He calls sinners like you and me to be His disciples

because He knows we need His help. You and I desperately need His undeserved mercy and grace.

That is the point God is making in our Old Testament text. He chose the children of Israel as His own. He led them out of captivity, sustained them for forty years in the wilderness, and has set before them life and death, blessing and curse. (cf: Deuteronomy 30:15-20) If they obey His Commands, love Him alone, and walk in His ways, He will bless them. Or, they can turn away from Him and worship false gods, and He will surely allow them to perish.

Before He laid the foundation of the world, God saw you wandering in your wilderness of selfish sinfulness in need of a Savior. In His rich love and mercy, the Father sent His only begotten Son into His creation to walk the perfect way of a disciple of God that you cannot. Unlike you and me, Jesus came, not to seek His own will but to do the will of the Father, walking the way of the cross. (cf: John 5:30)

Though He is God, Jesus emptied Himself, taking on the flesh of man, humbling Himself by becoming servant of all, being obedient to the point of death on a cross. (cf: Philippians 2:6–8) During His earthly ministry He had no home or possessions. He depended solely upon the hospitality of others. He even renounced His biological family saying:

“For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.” (Matthew 12:50)

Jesus knew that the way of cross would end in His painful death. Yet, in the ultimate act of renouncing all, He willingly gave over His very life, all the while knowing His Father would turn His back, allowing allow Him to suffer hell on earth so that sinners such as you and me might become His true disciples. Jesus came to walk the radical way of the cross for you. Now, He calls you to walk that way for Him. Not out of compulsion, but out of your own free will. (cf: Philemon 14)

Just like little Emma Rose earlier this morning, you became God’s own child by the washing of regeneration in the Holy waters of Baptism. (cf: Titus 3:5) At the font Emma and you were born again, born of water and of the Spirit and united with Christ to walk in the way of His death, that you may walk in the newness of His life. (cf: Romans 6:4–8) Baptism is not your work or a work of man. It is work of Christ who has made you a new creation, freely imputing to you all His good and gracious gifts, including the Holy Spirit who empowers you to walk as a child of God. (cf: Acts 2:38; Romans 10:17)

Christ did all the work. Emma did not choose Him. You did not choose Him. Christ chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruits (cf: (John 15:16) of repentance, fruits of faith and righteousness, and perform acts of virtue and good works toward your neighbor. As a child and heir of His heavenly kingdom you are to walk by the Spirit, so that you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. (cf: Galatians 5:16)

In our text, Jesus is using the word *hate* metaphorically, rejecting the lesser thing for the greater. Neither your closest relatives nor you yourself can provide yourself the forgiveness of sins and

the strength to live the Christian life. So, in that sense, family, friends, and even self must be rejected. Discipleship with Jesus is impossible if we make gods of mere humans.

For Jesus, bearing the cross meant giving Himself for the benefit of the undeserving. No disciple can bear the same cross of Jesus. It is impossible. The crosses that you bear do not atone for your own sin or the sin of others. The disciple who bears his own cross is a disciple who lives for others and serves others, just as Jesus lived for and served sinners. And that can only be done by loving Jesus above all else.

As a Baptized believer in Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, bear your cross and come after Jesus. The way of the cross is to renounce all that you love: the love of self, money, lifestyle, and the desires of the flesh. The way of the cross is the way of love and sacrifice, freeing you to make commitments rooted in love and service to family, friends, and all who have need.

By the way of the cross Jesus went to be with the Father and by His cross He has paid your debt and given you access to the Father – not just here in time – but entrance into His heavenly Kingdom there in eternity. Jesus bids you to walk the way of the cross, for it is the way of life that leads to God, for He Himself strengthens and nourishes you by Word and Sacrament, preserving you in this life unto eternal life with Him in heaven.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.