

Sermon - 09/04/22

Text - Luke 14:25-35

Theme - "Listen Up!"

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

St. Luke begins our lesson today by saying that "*great crowds accompanied Jesus*". Well, of course they did. After all, He was a celebrity, a sensation, a wonder. His fame was cast far and wide. Everyone had heard about the miracles He had done: feeding thousands with just a couple of loaves and fishes, healing the sick, walking on the water, calming storms with a mere word, casting out demons, even raising the dead. Everyone knew too of His amazing teaching, done with such power and authority that it drew folks like a magnet pulls steel. Who could forget the colorful parables He had told, or the method of prayer He had given (calling God "*our Father*"), or the way He stood up to the petty and man-made rules of the religious elite?

Jesus was an event, a happening. To put it in today's vernacular, Jesus was a "rock star". His travels were noted and whenever He came into a town or territory, the crowds were ready and waiting for Him. His name was on everybody's lips. Who wouldn't want to be there, to see what He would do next? To hear the pearls of wisdom that poured forth from His mouth? To witness Him put those uppity snobs – those holier-than-thou Pharisees and scribes and teachers of the Law – in their proper place? Maybe He will heal me, or my friend. Maybe we will see Him stop the wind and waves with just a word or gesture. Maybe we will be there when something exciting and earth-shaking will happen – and we'll be able to tell our children and grandchildren all about it. Great crowds, indeed.

But note also that Luke only says that these great crowds "*accompanied*" Jesus. Not that they put their faith in Him. Not that they trusted in Him to be their Savior. Not that they

confessed Him to be the Son of God, the Messiah, the One promised all the way back to Eden in the aftermath of Adam's sin. No. Luke just says that these folks "accompanied" Him. They were present. They were there. But that was about it. They were simply spectators, watchers, consumers.

Oh, sure, some expressed their desire to follow Him. Some wanted to be disciples. Some confessed Him to be sent from God. But these seem to be the exceptions, rather than the rule. And even these apparently were a little wish-washy, a little unsure, a little unsteady. Hedging their bets. Unwilling to devote themselves completely to Him and His cause.

All of which prompts Jesus to turn and see them there but not truly following Him, and then say what He said at the beginning of our reading:

If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.

Surely that got their attention! Surely that got a rise. Those are some pretty striking words, words designed to get a person's attention. And they did.

But what exactly did Jesus mean by them? What precisely was He trying to get across to these folks who merely "accompanied" Him, who listened to Him only as a diversion, who treated Jesus as a sort of traveling circus, who were there just to see a show - a miracle now and then, an argument with a Pharisee or scribe, a bit of religious entertainment?

Does Jesus mean that we should literally *hate* our parents, our siblings, our children, our neighbors, even ourselves? Well, of course not. Elsewhere Jesus makes it very plain that we are to love just as He loves. So clearly, He cannot mean that we are to hate anyone. So what IS His point? (pause)

Jesus gives a couple of examples, to clarify and illustrate His meaning. First, He mentions the man who undertakes the building of a tall and imposing tower, but who runs out

of money before he can finish. Of course, everyone scoffs at such a man. They laugh at his foolishness in starting something he cannot complete. What kind of idiot does THAT, they giggle. Now he has only a half-build shell (not an imposing tower) – but he also has no money!

Jesus' second example is that of a king who starts a war with another king, only to find out that his army is not sufficient to the task. That ruler has painted himself into a corner – now what is he to do? Jesus says this king will have to humble himself and send emissaries to the other king, seeking – even begging – for terms of peace. Such a king not only looks foolish and weak, but he also puts his throne (and his people) in jeopardy. Kings like that do not last very long.

So, what is Jesus saying? Simply this: there is a cost to being His disciple. And those who want to be such – and not just hangers-on and watchers and spectators, as were most of the crowd in our reading – that those who truly want to follow after Jesus must know the cost. They must be willing to pay that cost. They must understand that everything – everything – has to be counted as loss, in order to be Christ's. He has to be first. Indeed, He has to be everything and all to us. Nothing dare come between Him and us, let alone come before Him. Not family. Not wealth. Not personal pleasure. Not anything. Those who wish to be Christ's disciples must, like Him, bear the cross. They must crucify themselves as they follow Him.

And if one cannot pay that price, if you cannot cover that cost, then it is best not to even try. You will only fail and become a laughingstock, a source of mockery and derision, a joke to all. (pause)

Now, we like to think of ourselves as disciples of Jesus. As those who, unlike the Jews of our lesson, DO see Jesus as more than just entertainment, more than just a traveling show,

more than just a Teller of tales and Worker of miracles. We see Him as the Son of God. As the Savior of the world. As the One we worship and adore.

But, remember, that discipleship comes at a cost. A very steep cost. So, how are we doing at paying that price? Jesus says that He must be first -- He must be *all* -- for us. As the catechism explains the First Commandment: We are to fear, love, and trust Him above all things. That is the cost of being Christ's disciple. Crucifying ourselves and our desires. Dying to self. Killing that part of us that would fear, love, or trust in anything besides Him.

I have to confess that, while I want that to be true of me, all too often I fail and fall short. Like the man who runs out of money before the tower is completed, I do not have the spiritual capital on my own with which to build such an edifice, such a structure of faith. Like that king whose armies were not enough, so I cannot stand up to the attacks and assaults of the devil, the world, and my own sinful flesh. As much as I would like to claim that I have been that perfect disciple of Christ, I have not. I put all sorts of things ahead of Him: my own pleasures and comforts, work, rest, family, Packer football, money, acceptance from the world, and so on. I have not willingly carried my own cross and followed Him, but instead have run away from such crucifixion of self. When the devil attacks me, I flee, I surrender, I give up and give in - in short, I sin.

My guess is that you will echo me in all this. That you too have failed to be the disciple Jesus envisioned in our text. That you too have failed - miserably - in fearing, loving, and trusting in God above all things (not to mention our failures to love our neighbor perfectly and all the time, as God also directs and commands). We indeed are poor, miserable sinners. As are all people. (pause)

But the Good News is that where we have failed to count the cost - or to pay it - Jesus did not. Even before creation, God knew we would sin and would need a Savior. The Father

knew He would have to send His Only-Begotten Son to live and die for us, to suffer hell for us, to rise again to open heaven for us. The Son knew what the cost was – and He was willing to pay it, because His Father sent Him AND because He loves us. The Holy Spirit knew the price – and He empowered and enabled the Son to pay it.

The price was incredibly steep. Too steep, if you look at it according to our logic and reason. Why would God – who has everything and needs nothing – why would God pay this price? For such sinners – loathsome and wicked and rebellious sinners – like you and me? But thankfully our Lord does not go by our thinking. No, His ways are not our ways and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. And so the Father DID send the Son. The Son DID suffer and die and rise again. The Spirit DID strengthen the Son in His work of salvation and He brings it to us in the Gospel of Word and Sacrament.

So, the price has been paid. Not by you or me – we never could pay it, even if we were able to count it. But by our God Himself. You have been redeemed (bought back) from your slavery to sin/death/devil by the holy and precious blood of our Savior Jesus Christ. And where you and I have failed to whole-heartedly, completely, perfectly follow after Him as His disciples, He comes back to us and forgives us, picks us up, and calls us again to Himself.

He does so again today. Earlier in this service, you confessed that you are indeed a disappointing disciple, a failed follower, a reluctant and half-hearted and sinful Christian. But what came right after that confession? The absolution, where you were forgiven all those sins for Jesus' sake. The liturgy, the hymns, the lessons, the sermon (if I do my job properly), the Lord's Supper – these all convey and give and impart to you that forgiveness as the Gospel of Jesus Christ is brought to bear upon you. What a joy and treasure it is to be here and to receive that, week after week!

And what opportunities He gives us in our parish! We have a day school, where the students are immersed in Christ as they learn. We have Sunday School and Adult Bible classes, where all ages can hear God's voice of love as we gather around His Word. We have women's groups and Wednesday morning Bible Breakfast. What a blessing we have in these, and how the Lord would work in our lives through them!

The more we take advantage of these wonderful gifts - worship and Bible study - the more we are strengthened to be better followers of Jesus. In each of these we hear of Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. Of what He has done for us (and what He continues to do each day). Of how He has paid the price we never could. Of how, in Him, we have forgiveness and eternal life. Of how He has kept all of the commandments and Law of God for us. Of how He never leaves or forsakes or deserts us (even if we sometimes leave Him, or fail to follow Him).

In worship and Bible study, Jesus comes to us just as He came to those towns and villages of Judea 200 years ago. He comes, not merely to entertain but to save. So, be here. Come to worship. Attend Sunday School and Bible class and other growth opportunities. Receive the blessings and grace that God wants you to have - purchased and won at such a tremendous cost to Himself. Be refreshed and encouraged and enlivened by His saving Gospel. As Jesus said: He who has ears to hear, let him hear! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Wed - Nicene Creed
OS - Nicene Creed
FE - Offertory/Prayers