

Discipleship is Costly

Golf, fishing, stamp collecting, bird watching, hunting, photography, drawing, running, bicycling, sewing, skiing, quilting, sports, kayaking, crocheting, cooking... How many of you have a hobby? There are countless more, of course. Are you passionate about it? Do you dedicate time, energy, and other resources in the pursuit of your hobby? I'm sure you do. But what about those seasons of life where everything else takes precedence? The hobby falls to the side a bit. A hobby is all about the enjoyment and ease of doing it, really. If it becomes a demand on us, the enjoyment ceases! A hobby should be easy, convenient, nice, rewarding, pleasant - for the hobbyist, at least.

In our gospel lesson for this morning Jesus is speaking against an easy Christianity, a soft Christianity, a convenient Christianity, a Christianity that wants to hear nice, pleasant things from Jesus but doesn't want to hear about dedication, commitment, responsibility and suffering. He is speaking against Christianity as a hobby, a plaything. A large crowd was following Jesus for a variety of reasons. Some saw Jesus as a celebrity. Some were just curious about this famous man, coming in order to check him out. Still others wanted something from him: perhaps a healing or to be fed. This can still be true today of those who are called Christians. So Jesus turns to the crowd and tells the truth about what it means to follow him. **"So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."** As a follower of Jesus Christ

WE MUST COUNT THE COST OF BEING HIS DISCIPLE.

Jesus isn't saying that we must earn a relationship with him by what we do or by being dedicated to him. Jesus doesn't ask us to give him anything in order for him to be our Savior. He is the one who gives to us. All by himself he has overcome sin and death and restored our relationship with God. He lived a sinless life for us, he died for our sins and he rose from the dead to give us life. No help comes from us in all this! What he does is freely offer and give to us his word and sacraments. To be our Savior, Jesus doesn't ask anything of us but only to believe in what he has done for us. **"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."**

Yet while Jesus asks nothing of us to become his disciple, he asks everything of us *after* we have become his disciple. He has every right to ask everything from us

because he gave up everything for us. Even though he was God in human form he did not act like it. Can you imagine being God and doing that? Think how tempting it would be to use that power for our own benefit, even while hurting others in the process. Jesus didn't do that. Instead he humbled himself; he refrained from using his awesome power. We mustn't forget that no one took Jesus' life from him. That was not possible. Rather, he gave his life as an act of love.

Once we trust in him as our Savior from sin and death he expects us to love him. We are to love him more than anyone or anything in all the world. **“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.”** More than our money and houses and cars and things. More than our father or mother, wife or husband, more than our children or brothers and sisters. We are to love Jesus Christ more than we love our own life. We would die for him if we had to! Why? Because only Jesus Christ gives us peace with God through the forgiveness of our sins and victory over death in the resurrection.

So then let's be clear about what Jesus is saying. He asks nothing from us to be our Savior, but when we confess him to be our Savior then he expects everything from us. Nothing in all of life is to be more important than him. **“You shall have no other Gods”** sums it up quite nicely.

Now how can we do what Jesus asks us to do? How can we love him more than anyone or anything? How can we give up everything for him? The short and not so sweet answer is that we can't.

That's the point of the two parables that Jesus tells. **“For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’”** The point is that the builder is not able to finish it. **“Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.”** The king with the smaller army realized that he didn't have a fighting chance.

When it comes to being 100% dedicated to him we can't do it with will power or our own strength and ability. We don't have enough to finish it. We

don't have a fighting chance. Yes we love Jesus, but do we love him more than we love our family? Would we be willing to choose Jesus over a family member? Would we choose Jesus over our mother or father; husband or wife; over our children? Do we choose him over ourselves?

Why then do we sin? Why do we skip church? Why do we read other books more than we read the Bible? Yes, we love Jesus but would we be willing to give up all our money and house and all things for him? If we lived in a country where it was illegal to be a Christian and we could lose our job, what would we choose? Jesus or job? If our offering was no longer tax deductible would we still give a generous offering?

Are we willing to take up our cross and suffer for him? Would we be willing to die for him? Jesus asks for much if we follow him. He asks for everything. If he died for us, he expects us to die for him. Jesus is not a hobby. He is not a part of our lives. He is our life. Twice in our text Jesus says **“count the cost”** and when we do we discover that we don't have what it takes. Trying to do what you can't do is like salt that has lost its saltiness - its good for nothing.

So what's the answer? It seems too simple, but simplicity doesn't change the truth. The answer is Jesus. Jesus himself will give us the ability to do what he asks of us. That's what Paul says in his letter to the Philippians: **“for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”** Jesus Christ has paid for all of our sins, even those sins that we commit after we believe in him. Jesus has died for our lack of commitment to him. He has died for our sin of not loving him as we should. He has died for our sin of not picking up our cross and following him. He has died for our sin of loving family members and even the things of this world more than him. The answer to *every* sin we have is God's forgiveness in Jesus Christ. Whenever we seek God's forgiveness in Jesus Christ, it's always given. Jesus never denies you or pushes you away. God's love and forgiveness in Jesus Christ is the very power you need to live for him. What greater message can a troubled sinner hear from God than “I love you and forgive you”? Only such love and forgiveness can give us the strength to love Jesus more than our family, to pick up our cross and suffer for him, and be willing to renounce all that we have.

How do we become that kind of Christian that Jesus speaks of? A Christian who loves Jesus more than family? A Christian who is willing to pick up his cross and suffer for Jesus? A Christian who renounces all things for Jesus? In the parables of the tower and of the king going to war Jesus has given us the answer:

we can't do it. We don't have the ability or strength to be that kind of Christian. I promise you that it's not a matter of trying harder. You will fail. But Jesus can make us this kind of disciple. For it is only by the grace of God that we can be faithful, willing to forsake all things for our lord and Savior. By the grace of God, the Holy Spirit will keep your faith strong. God will be with you here in time, and you will be with Him forever in eternity. Amen.

- *Pastor Michael Schuermann*
S.D.G.