

**Scripture Lesson:** Luke 14:25-34

*Pew Bible N.T. pg. 73*

<sup>25</sup> Now large crowds were traveling with him, and he turned and said to them, <sup>26</sup> "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. <sup>27</sup> Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. <sup>28</sup> For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? <sup>29</sup> Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, <sup>30</sup> saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' <sup>31</sup> Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? <sup>32</sup> If he cannot, then while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. <sup>33</sup> So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions. <sup>34</sup> "Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? <sup>35</sup> It is useful neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; they throw it away. If you have ears to hear, then hear!"

**Response to the Word**

One: This is the Word of God for the people of God

**All: Thanks be to God!**

Luke 14:25-34

09/07/2025 – Saginaw First U.M.C.

"The Cost of Discipleship"

Pastor Amy Terhune

Several centuries ago, in a mountain village in Europe, a wealthy nobleman wanted to leave a useful legacy to his community, so he built them a church. No one was permitted to see the plans or the inside of the structure until it was finished. At its grand opening, the people gathered and marveled. Everything had been thought of and included. It was a masterpiece, not only in beauty but in practicality.

That is, until someone suddenly cried out, "Wait a minute! Where are the lamps? It is really quite dark in here. How will the church be lighted?" The nobleman pointed to some brackets in the walls, and then he gave each family in town a lamp, which they were to bring with them each time they came to worship.

"Each time you are here" the nobleman said, "the place where you are seated will be lighted. Each time you are not here, that place will be dark. This is to remind you that whenever you fail to gather as the family of God, some part of God's house will be dark."

That's a poignant story, isn't it? I recall in the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of the gospel of John, Jesus tells his disciples "I am the light of the world". It's one of seven "I AM" statements in John's gospel. But in the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew's gospel, Jesus tells his disciples: "You are the light of the world. No one hides a lamp under a basket." Which is not a contradiction. Rather, Jesus is the source of all light. The power that lights the world. You and I are receptors of that power; channels of the great light that sources us, called to follow and reflect the light of Christ beyond ourselves. The poet Edward Everett Hale put it like this:

I am only one,  
But still, I am one.

I cannot do everything,  
But still, I can do something;  
And because I cannot do everything,  
I will not refuse to do the something I can do.

[adapted from James W. Moore, *Some Things Are Too Good Not To Be True*, Dimensions: Nashville, 1994. pp. 117-118, in illustrations for Luke 14:25-34 on [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com).]

We are called to be light in the world – Christ’s light.

But when we turn to our scripture lesson for this morning, there’s no talk of light or of the difference we may make – not directly, at any rate. Instead, Jesus tells the crowds: 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. Which is jarring, isn’t it? I mean, it’s not like I haven’t read this lesson before, but still, it gets under my skin every time. Hate? Our family? It’s one of the hardest and harshest passages we’ll find anywhere in Luke’s gospel. Is this the same Jesus that instructs us to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and love our neighbor as ourselves? Is this the same Jesus that calls us to love our enemies and pray for those who want to do us harm? Is this the same Jesus that would protect a woman caught in adultery, heal a beggar by the roadside, welcome a prostitute into his company, and promise paradise to a convicted criminal?

To be sure, it is the same Jesus, but sometimes it’s hard to reconcile. Understand what’s going on here. There’s a large crowd. Peter’s probably in the crowd. And James and John and Andrew and Judas and Mary Magdalene and Susanna and Joanna—all of his faithful disciples who followed him to the end. But it was a large crowd, not an intimate cram session on the mountaintop, so every Tom, Dick and Harry is in the crowd, too. The committed and the curious. And Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem – to be betrayed, abandoned, crucified. The sand in his hourglass is just about run through. So, he cuts to the chase. The difference between the committed and the curious? Are you willing to put God first? Are you willing to put God first if it costs you something? If it hurts? If it means sacrificing all that you hold dear?

The Abingdon Commentary explains that while you and I think of love and hate as emotions, the ancient world thought of them as behavior. In other words, love and hate were not things one felt—they were things one did. Family was central in Jesus’ time. “Hating one’s family meant doing something that disgraced them... If some members joined a suspect movement and abandoned their home, this brought disgrace on the family, particularly if done in disobedience to the patriarch (cf. Malina 1993, 2-3, 79).”

Jesus is saying that we had better be prepared to do that—to disappoint family, to suffer embarrassment, to buck expectations. We’d better have a clear idea of our priorities. It’s not that Jesus didn’t take family seriously. He loved his mother enough to see to her care while he was hanging on the cross. But he took God even more seriously.

Earlier in Luke’s gospel – in the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter, Jesus’ mother and brothers come to fetch him while he’s teaching. Maybe they thought he was crazy. Maybe they thought he was in danger. Maybe they thought he was tarnishing the family name. Maybe all of the above and more. But Jesus doesn’t cooperate. He doesn’t come quietly. When his disciples tell him that his mother and brothers want to see him, he responds by telling them, “My mother and brothers and fathers and sisters are those who hear the word of God and act on it.” His family are those who commit to the mission. And I guess he hasn’t changed his tune. His family are those who are so devoted to the cause that they will face down danger, sacrifice, ridicule and even death.

Which has very clear implications for you and me. Like Jesus, we’re called to define family broadly. “Years ago, famed anthropologist Margaret Mead was asked a question: What was the earliest sign of

civilization in any given culture? One might expect the answer to be a clay pot or perhaps a fishhook or grinding stone. Her answer surprised her audience. "The first sign of civilization is a healed femur." The femur, of course, is the leg bone below the knee. Mead explained that no healed femurs are found where the law of the jungle or survival of the fittest is what reigns. A healed femur shows that someone cared. Someone had to do that injured person's hunting and gathering until the leg healed. Someone protected them, . The evidence of compassion, she said, is the first sign of civilization. [from R. Wayne Willis, "To Illustrate...", LEADERSHIP, Faly 1995, p. 41; as adapted from "A Cup of Cold Water" by King Duncan, [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com).]

As I read the news lately, I find myself wondering if lack of compassion suggests we're becoming uncivilized. The poorest among us have been labeled as lazy moochers, particularly if they're black or brown. Undocumented immigrants are being called criminal. Transgender persons are feared as predators, and even women are hearing their fundamental giftedness questioned with accusations we haven't heard 30 years – emotional, illogical, fragile, and duplicitous. I fear for a society that starts demonizing whole groups of people. That's usually when compassion dries up and the pretense of civilization is undercut by a wave of fear, scapegoating, and prejudice that is wholly uncivilized. The truth is that Jesus stretched the idea of family far enough to be disquieting and uncomfortable. Family is not just those like us, but those committed to advancing the values of God's Kingdom – things like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, not to mention the reality that every other living being is a neighbor Jesus calls us to love with our deeds as well as our voices. Jesus defined family broadly – it wasn't blood, ideology, or nationality. Jesus defined family by those who would follow his lead.

Which clearly indicates a choice before us. As a child, I recall our neighbor, whenever she faced something difficult, would say "well, it's just a cross I'll have to bear." She said it about everything from hip surgery to driving the long way around a construction zone to going without a new couch because it wasn't in the budget that year. The clear implication of that was that she bore it because she had no choice, but if it were up to her, she'd just as soon not bear that cross. I didn't think anything of it back then. But I realize now that bearing a cross and carrying a cross are not the same thing. We're not passive bystanders who bear a cross because we have no choice. We have a choice. We have a say. We choose to carry our cross and follow, not because we love suffering, but because we love the one who carried his cross first; who died on it. We carry our cross and follow willingly, because we believe in the promises and the mission that Jesus spearheads. Anyone can be a curious onlooker. Fewer will be believers. And fewer still will be true disciples.

Too often today, we think discipleship is a mission trip, perhaps a bible study, faithful attendance on Sunday, and maybe giving till it hurts to help our church or a cause we believe in. And all of these are meaningful things.

But discipleship is more than what we do. It's who we are. To be a disciple is to fall in step behind Jesus. To commit oneself to spreading light. The reality is that you and I cannot plan for what God will ask of us. But we can prepare ourselves to expect God to ask something.

Which is why Jesus urges us to think it through. Count the Cost. Consider your options. "Because," says Jesus, "walking in my footsteps is no walk in the park. If you're going to follow, you're going to suffer. Count on it." Which is not a newflash—at least, it shouldn't be. And I appreciate the fact that Jesus tells it like it is. "Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." Fair warning.

But Bill Ritter got me thinking when he pointed out that we don't normally hear this kind of thing from Jesus. "He doesn't say: Why don't you go home and think about it? Why don't you talk it over with several of your friends? Why not take these papers and have your attorney finesse the fine print?"

Why not give it a year and let it sink in? Why not proceed cautiously, lest your present enthusiasm cloud your judgment?

"No, I don't hear that from the lips of Jesus. Instead, he calls disciples who "straightaway" leave their nets and follow. Then he adds words about not looking over your shoulder....not going back to settle affairs....and, for God's sake, not even going back home to bury the dead. The message seems to be: "Do it now, while the spirit is on you, or while the Spirit is in you." In the making of Christians, there is something to be said for study and reflection. But there is something even greater to be said for passion and urgency. Neither Jesus nor the church has, as its primary message: "Hey, take your time, we'll be here when you get it all figured out." We will. But that's not our primary message. Instead, we say: "Every journey starts with a first step. And you will never get it figured out until you take a first step." No, I can't see Jesus raising the yellow flag of caution. So, what is all this business about, anyway?

"Well, I've been helped by a quartet of commentators here (especially Joseph Parker and William Barclay). But most especially by Ernest Campbell who asks:

"Could it be that the underlying concern is not with our ability to finish the job, but with God's? It would appear that Jesus is saying: "You wouldn't start a tower you couldn't finish. You wouldn't wage a war you couldn't win. Of course you wouldn't. Well, neither would God. God has the plans to win....the stuff to win....the will to win....and God will win."

"Jesus preached a Kingdom that is obtainable here (in part) and attainable eventually (in full). As for the Kingdom, it's both here and coming, he said. Then he added (in effect): "And when my time on earth is finished, the cause will go on. Don't sweat it." To which Campbell adds: God has not vacated. God is not dead. God did not enter the fray in order to settle for a tie with evil. God has the means to win. And God means to win...

"So, to whatever degree you may possess a cost accountant's mentality....adding up pluses and minuses....credits and debits....assets and liabilities....go versus stay....stand versus sit.... follow versus fall back....the one thing you need to factor in is not whether you are able (sooner or later, you're not), but whether God is able.

To which the burden of this passage....and of my preaching....is to suggest that the answer is a resounding "Yes." [7 ¶s adapted slightly from "On Starting What You Can't Finish" by William A. Ritter, [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com).] God has counted the cost. Great personal cost. And deemed us worth it.

So, I'll make a confession. I doubt myself far more than I've ever doubted God. I question the strength of my will and the depth of my faith. I question the tenacity of my will to withstand losses that previous disciples have born – loss of family, reputation, work, freedom, wealth, even life itself. I live with those questions and doubt, not because they have value in and of themselves, but because I can't be ready to sacrifice if I've never accepted the possibility that I may be called upon to do so. Following Christ can hurt. But I still hold out hope for a brighter world and a bigger family. I believe God is moving. I believe the Kingdom is coming. I catch glimpses of it every now and again. And I know Jesus is the light of my world. But I can't escape the heartfelt conviction that the world will be brighter if I show up. That is the cost, and the reward, of discipleship. Thanks be to God. Amen