



LAKEWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Brian Mitchell

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The Cost

Luke 14: 25-33

²⁵ Now large crowds were traveling with him, and he turned and said to them, ²⁶ “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. ²⁷ Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸ 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? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, ³⁰ saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ ³¹ 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? ³² If he cannot, then while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. ³³ So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

Thanks to Virginia and Aidan for serving as liturgists this morning.

A few weeks ago, Pastor Joy and I were planning the preaching schedule, and she was kind enough to allow me to preach when my mum and sister are here in town. They are sitting right down there, say hi afterwards. I thought that it would be nice, they will get to hear me give the message when they are here. Then I saw the passage. We are following the lectionary through Luke this summer and the week when I

get to share the message the week when my mum and sister are here is the week where Jesus tells his hearers,

“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.”

Great! I could have done this easily if I was talking to you about hating your family to be Jesus’ disciple, but here we are, we I have this passage when my wife and son, my mother and sister are sitting right here.

But I enjoy those passages, when we have comments like this from Jesus and our response, is What! Must we really hate our family to be Jesus’ disciple? This passage also has Jesus say that we must carry our cross and sell all our possessions to be His disciple. I mean who can do these things? I suspect the room would be quite empty if I asked those of you cannot do these things to leave. These are the kind of comments from Jesus that make me think, yes, these really are the words of Jesus, because no one would make this up to try and convince folks to follow Him.

This passage follows on from the parable that Pastor Joy preached on last week, regarding avoiding taking the top seat at a wedding banquet in case you are moved to a lesser seat. In between the two passages is another parable that Jesus tells of a great dinner where those invited make excuses to not attend so the owner of the house invites, the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame, and then everyone is invited so his house may not be empty.

So, we have this message that all are invited into the house of God, all are invited to the great dinner, perhaps especially those who are not

expected to be on the guest list. Jesus was beginning to introduce the idea to his hearers that the kingdom of God is going to be for all people.

Our passage begins by letting us know that **now** there is a large crowd travelling with him. People want to hear what Jesus has to say. Now you would think that Jesus and his followers would be delighted by this, but Jesus chooses to share with them what it means to be His disciple, he explains what the cost.

There is no small print with Jesus, there is no bait and switch, Jesus is upfront with those who have come to listen to Him what is required to be a follower. And it is not easy to hear. It is a passage that is still difficult for us today. We will focus today on these two sayings of Jesus.

“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. ²⁷Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

So, in the previous passage we have this wonderful message that all are invited to the great dinner, all are invited and welcome to the heavenly banquet, but now Jesus does not want to pull the wool over their eyes, here is the cost, here is what it means to follow.

We speak often of our salvation being a gift of God, it is free, it is God’s doing. God does the saving not us. So how can it be that there is then a cost to following Jesus. We know we cannot buy salvation, we cannot earn salvation, so what is the cost?

A few years ago, The Mitchells bought a house. Looking for a way to save a few bucks as is my want, we asked if anyone in the church would be able to help us move. And a hardy group of LPC members stepped up

and spent a day helping us get our things from one house to the new house. We even promised them a housewarming party to say thanks, that didn't happen because a few weeks later Covid showed up! Now for The Mitchells we got our stuff moved for free, but if you were to ask any of those folks who spent a day loading and unloading a truck for us, there was a cost. It was not free! Now I believe they get a special luxury spot in heaven for that act of kindness, but that may just be crazy Mitchell theology!

The point is, there was a cost. Our salvation came at a huge cost for Jesus and now Jesus speaks of the cost for us.

A few weeks ago, I heard in a conversation about church attendance that we belong to a church that does not tell its members they are going to hell if they do not come to church. I hear that comment as a positive thing, we are a people of grace, a people of encouragement, we are not driven by guilt or inciting fear when it comes to our faith. The other side of the coin of not being driven by guilt or fear is we lose sight of the cost. We tend to avoid teachings such as today's. Well, the lectionary does not allow us to skip over this passage, so let's dig in.

When Jesus sees the large crowd, he does not do what most modern marketing experts would suggest, to maintain and grow His crowd. It almost seems that Jesus looks at this large crowd and thinks, I don't think these folks get what it means to be my follower. They may just want to be in the room; they may just be here for the food. I am going to lay it out for them. I am not sure that Jesus would have pleased modern church growth experts. He tells the people why they cannot be His disciples!

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.

What is going on here? What does Jesus mean? We know that Jesus often speaks in Hyperbole, He often says things to grab the attention of those listening. He also has a history of saying things that we obviously should not take literally. We read sayings of Jesus such as cut off your hand or gouge out your eye if it causes you to sin, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich person to go to heaven, leave the dead to bury the dead.

Now I do not share these examples to water down what Jesus says here. His use of the word hate conveys the seriousness of His demand. The Greek word for hate means to hate, there is no watering it down, but it is also used for the purpose of comparison. It is a Semitic expression that conveys indifference to one and preference of another. I love A and hate B means I prefer A to B. We see use of this expression throughout scripture, for example in Malachi 1, the expression is used, in the saying, *"I have loved Jacob but I have hated Esau"* to describe God's preference of Israel over Edom. In Matthew's parallel of this passage, Matthew says, Those who love their father and mother more than me cannot be my disciple. The word is to love less, not to hate. It is still difficult teaching. Jesus must be first in your life. We would say family first, that is normal, but Jesus is challenging us that He is first.

The second phrase from Jesus is *"Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple,"* when we think of a cross these days, we may be thinking of the beautiful jewelry that we wear, it may be the polished smooth cross that is hanging up front. To Jesus hearers the

cross was an instrument of death. To carry your cross was to walk to your death. You were heading to your crucifixion. Don't mistake this saying of Jesus as anything other than; to be my disciple, you must die to self. Now I do think damage has been done in the church with this teaching, where followers are led to believe they are worthless, and self-care is ignored. That is not what is going on here, but what is going on is the idea Jesus wants us to go all in with Him, which means we are not our priority anymore. Our self-centeredness is challenged.

There is no scientific understanding in our existence in our vast reality where I, Brian Mitchell, am the center of the universe. That is just nonsensical, it makes no sense that I am the center of the all things. Actually, the two people who may have thought I was the center of the universe for a few years are sitting there, but apart from my wife and mother, that would make no sense, yet that is how I have lived most of my life. All of us tend to live with that delusion. We see life and live life from our own perspective. Jesus is saying, I am setting you free from that, I am allowing you to recalibrate and allow God's divine love to be the center of reality. That allows us to focus not only on Jesus as our priority but allows us to focus on others and the difference we can make in their lives.

Considering the cost of being a follower of Jesus is not bad news; it is good news. We are free from the way of this world, we are free from the common idea of being successful, the idea of being the best, those concepts are recalibrated. To be our best, to be successful becomes, how we love God, how we serve Jesus, how we use our blessings to make a difference in the lives of others.

This is a difficult message, who can do it? It is so easy for us to fall short,

to mess this up.

So, I want to finish with a message of grace from the passage in Jeremiah, which we read earlier this morning. God gives the word to Jeremiah at a time when Israel has turned from God, has ignored the word of God, that if they turn again to God, God will act like the potter who reshapes damaged clay into a worthy vessel. Jeremiah states that God will reshape Israel into a worthy nation. In the same way God will take those places that we fall short and reshape us as our potter into a worthy vessel. God will reshape and reshape. Part of the process of learning the cost of being Jesus' disciple is being daily reshaped by God. We have a God of grace, who loves us beyond measure.

With that grace in mind, let us not dilute these words of Jesus, let them sink in and prayerfully consider how our lives are changed, how the lives of those around us are changed, when we take up our cross and make Jesus the priority in our lives. Amen.