

Let’s begin with prayer...

Lord, we have come this day to hear your words of healing love and hope. Enter our hearts and our spirits and teach us to follow you. Give us courage and strength to be your faithful disciples. In Your name we pray. Amen.



What's the Cost? *(of discipleship)*

Today’s sermon is titled: What’s the Cost? (of discipleship).

Let’s begin with our Call to Worship:

Leader: We are called to follow Jesus.

People: But following Jesus isn’t easy.

Leader: No. It will demand our dedication and our energy.

People: It will change our whole lives.

Leader: Come, all of you. Come and learn of the Lord Jesus.

People: Lord, we come, seeking your wisdom and your guidance. Amen.

Our scripture for today is found in the book of Luke 14:25-33 (NIV) which says:

²⁵ Large crowds were traveling with Jesus and turning to them he said: ²⁶ “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

²⁸ “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? ²⁹ For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, ³⁰ saying, ‘This person began to build and wasn’t able to finish.’

³¹ “Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won’t he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand?

³² If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. ³³ In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.

In this scripture Jesus is calling people to follow him in discipleship, and then he's reminding them that it's like building a tower that you don't want to leave half-finished because you don't have enough commitment or enough resources to finish it. It's like going to war and realizing you don't have enough soldiers to win the battle and defeat the enemy.

So, he says, "Be sure to count the cost before you sign up for discipleship with Jesus because it's costly. I don't want you to sign up innocently and be surprised later when the cost is very high."

"How do you count the cost when you don't know what's coming in your life?" you might ask. The answer is that Jesus requires, upfront, a commitment to the highest possible cost. And nothing later is going to surprise you then because you've already totally sold to the highest, most excessive cost.

In other words, you don't need to know the specifics of the cost in your own particular case if the agreement you sign is "I'm yours at any cost." And it's exactly what these verses say, isn't it?

The call to discipleship comes to each and every Christian, so the cost of discipleship is one each of us must pay, not just pastors.

There is a cost to discipleship, always, because the kingdom of heaven is like a treasure you find in a field, and you go sell everything you have to purchase it. You have to lose your life in order to find his.

The Bible speaks about "losing your life" for God's sake in several places, most notably in Matthew 10:39, Mark 8:35, and Luke 9:24, which state that *"whoever loses his life for my sake will find it"*. This concept refers to giving up one's own selfish desires, plans, and ways of living to wholeheartedly follow Jesus and live for God's will, which ultimately leads to spiritual and eternal life.



There is a cost to discipleship because we live in a broken world which can't accept the things or the people of God. There is a cost to discipleship because discipleship is learning to follow after Jesus, and Jesus' way was costly.

You have to be willing to lose some of the things that you may have treasured – like perhaps a friend or friends, you may have to choose between doing something that is right versus what others may be doing that you now consider to be wrong. (making fun of folks who are different/disabled, or gossiping, telling "white lies", etc.) You might have to quit working at a job that makes their employees do things that you now feel are not right to do. You need to be willing to make some hard choices that may change your life.

When I became a Christian, my life changed in many ways and not always what I first felt was good ways. I've lost some friends, and that really hurt at the time. But I've gained so many more friends over the years. When I became a pastor, my husband lost the friendship of someone who he'd been friends with for years – but because they didn't believe that clergy can be females, they dropped our friendship.

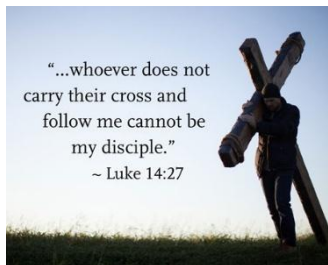
Why is it that we expect, if we follow Jesus, that our lives will be nothing like his? If you get mocked by your neighbors, so did he. If you become poor, so was he. You work some labor job that doesn't really suit your talents and abilities for twenty years just to help provide for your family, so did he.

If you aren't famous, and no one seems to care about your contributions, sometimes they crowded around him, but sometimes he was left with just a few friends. Sometimes they laughed at him.

At times, he wasn't even welcomed in, he didn't have any place to rest his head. Once the crowd turned against him and treated him like he was a criminal. And his way ended on a cross.

I don't know what the cost will be for you. Maybe he has to take some things away from you, like he did me, before you're able to see what in your life holds real value.

Maybe, like Peter, you're going to have to leave a perfectly good career to go follow him. Or like Matthew, ruin your reputation among the crowd you've always fought so hard to impress. Or like Thomas, you have to admit your doubts about God and church and all of it. Or like Nicodemus, you may need to admit, even though everyone looks up to you, that you, too, are a sinner in need of grace, that you're not as strong and put together as everyone thinks you are.



In Luke 14:27 it says: "And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." In order to be a disciple of Christ, one needs to carry his or her own cross. The cross represents the suffering that Jesus endured. As Christians, carrying our cross means being willing to endure our own hardship for the sake of Jesus. If we aren't willing to carry our cross, then there's no point in being a disciple of Jesus.

Jesus also says something in Luke 14 that's a little difficult to hear – he says: *"If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple."* Luke 14:26 He doesn't mean to "hate" our loved ones in the way that we think of it today. In this context, "hate" simply means to love less. What Jesus is saying is that in order to be a disciple, we should love him more than anything and anyone else.

Finally, in Matthew 16:24, Jesus explains that following him also includes self-denial. This means that we need to be willing to lay down some things we deeply love and enjoy for the sake of following Christ. Just as Jesus followed the Father's will and went to the cross, we should also follow God's will and do what God desires of us. Sometimes this will come easily, and other times it may be more difficult. But following Jesus means persevering and doing God's will whether it's easy or difficult.

If you came to Christ expecting that Christianity would bring an easy life, then you are mistaken. Christianity doesn't promise that everything will be perfect. It doesn't promise that everyone will love us, or that things will always work out just as we hoped. Jesus' disciples all had to endure hardship for the sake of the cross. We will too.

So why should we follow after Christ in our lives? Why we should pay the cost; why Jesus paid his life.

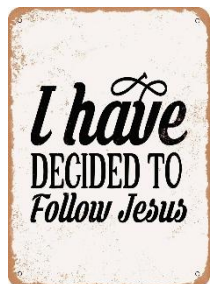
The why is, Jesus is the only one who is worth our lives. He is the only one who is able to do anything we want to see done in the world, the only one able to change us in all the ways we most desperately need to be changed.

But I don't want you to think that Christianity is all hardship and pain. It isn't. It's filled with so much joy and beauty. And any hardship we endure is ultimately meant to lead us towards a beautiful future in the presence of God.

When we become Christians, we are freed from the power of sin. It can no longer weigh on us like a burden. Similarly, Christianity gives us access into the presence of God and unhindered fellowship with our Creator. As Christians, we also gain a relationship with Christ and a community of fellow believers. Last but certainly not least, Christianity grants us eternal life with God.

When you become a Christian, you want to be more like Jesus, so you start to find that you want to do things to help others who are in need. You find that you want to tell others of the joy, love and grace that you've received from your relationship with God. You've found that you are worthy of the love and forgiveness that only God can give, and you want to tell others that they too are worthy.

Illustration/skit:



Suzie is walking along singing "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus" when her friend, Tammy, comes along and hears Suzie singing. Tammy asks her, "What? You've decided to follow Jesus? What in the world do you mean by that?"

Suzie says, "Well, I'm not really sure. I just want to be the kind of person who would make Jesus proud. I want to help others and that kind of thing." "So, you want to do good things to make Jesus like you and be proud of you?" Tammy asks.

Suzie answers, "No.....not exactly. It's hard to put into words. I want to do the kind of things that Jesus would want me to do, you know, like helping people, and being a person of peace. I want to feel some joy in my life.....and maybe I can find this joy by being a Jesus-person."

Tammy tells her, "Following Jesus isn't easy, you know! You really have to make a commitment. Maybe what you need is to seek Jesus' healing for yourself - to let go of the sorrow and fear in your life. Maybe when those things are gone, following Jesus won't be so hard."

"I just want to make a difference." Suzie says to her. "You can." Tammy explains, "You can Learn forgiveness, patience, mercy, justice, kindness. Be willing to "go the extra mile" in helping someone. And do it, not because you want to make Jesus proud, but because, as a follower, it is what you do...live by the words you speak."

Suzie continues to sing, ".....no turning back.....no turning back." Tammy smiles and says, "That's right. The road of hope and peace is before you. The journey awaits your first step" They join together singing, "...no turning back.....no turning back..."

Christianity does not promise a perfect life free from struggles. Following Jesus will always come at a cost. When we surrender our lives to Christ, we are essentially signing up to go through some hardship and suffering. However, we're also signing up for a wonderful relationship with God, fellowship with Christ and other believers, and eternity in heaven.

This morning, Christ is calling you. The question is not whether or not he is calling but whether or not we will respond. So whatever it is, and however the call comes, lay it down at the feet of Jesus. His way will cost you everything in the end, and yet everything worth having is found in seeking after him.

Let us pray...

God of mercy and of hope, be with us this day. We have gathered here to learn of your will for us. Sometimes it is not easy for us to realize that if we are to follow Jesus, we will have to make a total commitment to his ways. We will have to actually put into practice the good news of compassionate love, and healing mercies. Our hearts are filled with situations concerning family and friends, concerning neighborhood and world. We seek your healing mercies for these situations. Help us to remember that the same healing mercy is offered to each one of us. Give us strength and courage to really follow Jesus. For it is in His Name, we pray. Amen.

Holy Communion (in-person service)

Benediction: Go in peace and know that God walks with you on this journey. Bring the good news of Christ's healing love to all whom you meet. Amen.