

Luke 14:25-33

## Counting the Cost

Counting the cost of something is what we do each day. Our lives revolve around how much something costs. If you have purchased a home, are attending university, having children, even buying food and gas, you count the cost. You can't have these things in our economy without money and counting the cost. But things have always cost something, whether it be bartering goods for goods, or giving up something to have something else. Things cost.

But the cost of something is not necessarily monetary. There may be a cost of time, energy, and emotion. When someone sits beside a person in a hospital bed as they fight illness or face death, there is a cost. There are reasons people talk about compassion fatigue and care-giver burnout. There is a cost physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually when one finds they have to give so much of themselves for the benefit of another. And in those situations, it is most often done willingly and lovingly. We are willing to let care-giving cost us our very selves at times.

When planning to have a family, one needs to count the cost. It will cost money to raise up a child from food and diapers to post-secondary education. Yet a majority of people who find themselves in a parental relationship are willing to give up time, energy, and other dreams to have children, because the relationship is life-giving. Life giving in the sense that you actually bring life into the world, and life-giving in the love, joy, and even struggle that one faces with the child.

In the scripture reading we heard Jesus speak about what it costs to be a disciple, and what he says is pretty jarring. "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers, and sister, yes and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." (vv28-29)

Then he gives examples from his own time of counting the cost, just as you heard from me as this sermon began. But the cost that Jesus is asking in this passage seems extreme to say the least. And how can this be what is asked of us when Jesus is all about loving God and loving one's neighbour? Are not our families and our lives about loving others as well?

This is when it is imperative that we read the passage in the context of the whole of the Gospel of Luke, and in fact, the Bible. One of the other passages prescribed for this day is from Deuteronomy 30 which is all about keeping God's commandments, obeying them, living by them, so that the people will be blessed. Verse 19 reads, "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death,

blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him for that means life to you and length of days...”

Contrary to popular belief and is certainly counter-cultural, is that choosing God, choosing Jesus, means life. When Jesus is saying to the crowd that was traveling with him that they need to hate their family in order to be a disciple, it was a way of showing the extreme cost. Jesus does not advocate for hating family. The next chapter in Luke is all about going to great lengths to find things that are lost, a sheep, a lost coin, a lost son. One must place these passages together to get the whole picture. God is willing to go to great lengths to save us. The cost for God was Jesus. Many of you will recall what was likely the very first verse of scripture you memorized, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” John 3:16.

That verse still stands. Everything that Jesus is teaching must be understood in the light of God who loves so much that God was willing to count the cost of Jesus’ death. God was willing to lose Jesus to death to show love in the resurrection, the ultimate life-giving experience. And that is the thing, in order to experience Jesus in our lives, we have to be willing to sacrifice, and Jesus is saying, following him costs something.

It may cost you a relationship with someone really important to you. I have met Christians who converted from another religion and their families will have nothing to do with them, but this relationship with Jesus was so life-giving they were willing to give up the relationships with those that did not support their decision.

The other thing is that we are not always given clear direction when making choices in life about whether or not something takes us from following in faith. We make mistakes, we get it wrong, we struggle and falter. So, counting the cost is not always, in fact is rarely, cut and dry. Yet, making decisions, even ones that are difficult in order to follow Jesus need to be made so that we can experience life. This life is not something that can be understood unless you make the decision to follow Jesus and work at being a disciple.

Pastor and teacher David Lose writes, “Jesus isn’t inviting meaningless sacrifice. He isn’t inviting door-mat discipleship or a whiney Christianity (“that’s just my cross to bear”). Rather, he’s inviting us to a full-bodied Christian faith that stands over and against all those things that are often presented to us as life by the culture. Jesus invites us, that is, to the kind of abundant life that is discovered only as you give yourself away. The kingdom of God Jesus proclaims is about life and love. And just as love is one thing that only grows when it’s given away, so also is genuine and abundant life.”<sup>1</sup>

We count the cost of what it takes to follow Jesus knowing that even in the struggle and challenges, what we get from giving our all to Jesus is a transformed and abundant life.

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This sacrifice, this cost, is also about the generations to come and their lives. If the church dies, if our faith becomes lukewarm, not only do we miss out on the life promised to us in Christ, but so does each generation that comes after us. We rob our children and grandchildren, whether they are blood relatives or children that are important in our lives, we rob them of having the abundant life that only comes from experiencing Jesus.

If you have already become lukewarm toward your faith, you are not seeing or living the fullness of the abundant life God desires for you. This is not abundant in the sense that you have lots of money, power, possessions, or prestige, but an abundance of life-giving, transforming relationships, with an abundance of meaning and purpose in your life. These are things that cannot be bought.

Talking about what all this means cannot be done in one sermon, and the variety of ways people live out their faith and discipleship is as expansive as the personalities that choose this way of living. Still, this scripture, these words of Jesus are a starting point. And Jesus is saying, living an abundant life in Christ will cost us something, but the return, once experienced will be more than you could have anticipated or imagined.

You get this life by giving away the resources you have to give from time, energy, and talents, to money, experience, stories, and more to those closest to you and those who are lost. In this you will find yourself, you will find, Jesus, you will find, God. You will reap an abundant life out of what you are willing to let it cost you, of what you are willing to give of yourself.

Thanks be to God for the love, forgiveness, grace, and hope that comes through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.