

**AN INVITATION TO DISCIPLESHIP**  
**LUKE 14: 25-35**  
**OCTOBER 27 AND 28, 2019**

Jesus said: Your allegiance to me will cause division between families, will require you to give up what you hold dear, and will demand more from you than you can possibly imagine.

As Eugene Peterson translated verse 33 in the Message: “Simply put, if you’re not willing to take what is dearest to you, whether plans or people, and kiss it good-bye, you can’t be my disciple”.

When Jesus shares these words, he was speaking to a large crowd that had been travelling with him. Maybe they joined the crowd because they were attracted to his brash, confrontational style with the Pharisees. Maybe they joined the crowd because they were amazed by his ministry of healing. Perhaps they just loved the vision of a kingdom he painted, a kingdom where the normal class and status divisions fall away and everyone’s included.

Whatever the reason... they’re following him, and he warns them, if they want to be his disciples, they have no idea what they are getting into. One thing we can’t accuse Jesus of is false advertising. He lays it all right out there.

“If you’re not willing to take what is dearest to you, whether plans or people, and kiss it good-bye, you can’t be my disciple.”

Do you think the crowds suddenly got smaller? That the crowds suddenly thinned out? The vision was nice, but not nice enough to do what was being asked of them.

When I think about places where large crowds gather, my mind always turns to sporting events. At the beginning of the season, when teams are playing well, especially professional teams, the crowds are there, cheering their teams on, we’re #1, we’re #1! Cheering them on to a Bowl Game, or to the World Series or the Super Bowl, or the World Cup, whatever the championship title happens to be.

But when those same teams start losing, or the coach makes some difficult calls, fans start to thin out. And toward the end of the season, the seats and bleachers aren’t being filled anymore. And if “our” team doesn’t make it to the championship game ... often, we don’t even bother to watch.

Case in point, who’s playing in the World Series this year? Dodgers and Red Sox ... how many are watching? Especially that Friday night game that went 18 innings, the longest World Series game in history? If it were the Pirates or Phillies, or Yankees, even if you weren’t a baseball fan, you’d be watching or at least know who was playing.

That vision of a championship team at the beginning of a season is nice, but often not nice enough for fans to remain loyal and committed to the team to the end.

The large crowds in today's Scripture were having a similar problem. As long as Jesus was confronting the Pharisees, healing the sick, and championing the poor and oppressed among them, the crowds that followed got larger and larger ... they were winning with this guy.

But, Jesus knew their commitment was superficial. They wanted Jesus for what they could gain by aligning with him. So they quickly grew disillusioned when Jesus invited them to follow him in deeper ways, in ways that required real sacrifice. These large crowds were casual followers of Jesus, but not many stuck around when invited to become committed disciples.

Today's Scripture is perhaps the clearest of Jesus' teaching about what it means to be a disciple. He wants his followers to know up front what it takes to commit for the long term. Large crowds didn't impress Jesus. What he was seeking were people who were committed to his mission and purpose at all cost.

So, in vivid and strong terms, Jesus turns to the crowd, those who were traveling with him, those who were interested in what he had to say, and explains to them what it means to not be just casual followers, but committed disciples.

He begins by telling them disciples must be committed to him above everything and everyone else. Jesus used pretty strange language to describe the priority of a relationship with him. He identified our most intimate relationships – mother, father, wife, child, brother, sister, ourselves .... and

told would be disciples they must hate these people. What? No thanks, no need to sign me up.

So what did he mean? Because hate is inconsistent with any other teaching.

Jesus left no doubt – what he was calling his would be disciples to do was to love Him above anyone or anything else. He was saying, loving him is #1 priority, and if they were ever forced to choose, the winner of that choice must always be Jesus.

Jesus then follows up his “hate” statement with “Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”

Everyone in the crowd that day was familiar with what Jesus was referring to when he talked about “carrying the cross.” The cross was a cruel form of punishment used by the Romans. The criminal was forced to carry his cross to his place of execution. Everyone knew that person was saying good-bye to everything. There should have been no doubt in their minds, what Jesus was saying. Jesus didn't want people to make a commitment to him without seriously thinking *all the way through* what could be involved in that decision.

To intensify his point, Jesus uses two hypothetical examples. One is of a man who builds a watchtower over his land or city. To take on such a project is expensive. How embarrassing to start construction and then not have

enough money to finish it. So, estimate the cost before starting to build.

Likewise, Jesus paints a picture of a king assessing the strength of his army. It would be disastrous for an army of 10,000 soldiers to battle against an army of 20,000 soldiers. The king would be wise to negotiate peace instead of marching to defeat.

His point would be disciples? Have a plan. Count the costs, consider your resources, and make an informed decision. Do a cost-benefit analysis and a risk assessment. And don't make a hasty decision until you are sure you can follow all the way through!

We estimate costs all the time. If you were going to start a new business, write a new book, start a family—first you'd sit down and realize how hard it would be, if you could afford it, and whether or not you could withstand the moments of desolation that sometimes don't seem to stop.

Is "this" worth the money, the time, the risk? We look at the positives and negatives, and then we make a decision to move ahead when we're sure we can follow all the way through.

Jesus invites us to do the same today as we consider the cost of being a committed disciple. Is it worth the money, the time, the risk, can we follow *all the way* through?

If we sit down and tally the costs—as Jesus himself suggests that we do—the only reasonable decision is to

choose not to become a disciple of Christ. I mean who would want to have to choose to kiss everyone and everything good-bye?

But, with every day that ticks by in this world today, I feel more strongly than ever, that Jesus means exactly what he says here, and that we do need to wrestle with the cost of discipleship and whether or not we take seriously our commitment as disciples of Jesus Christ.

As the church, I think we make discipleship too easy, too comfortable. We've made following Jesus convenient. We've turned our calling to be disciples into something we can do in our spare time, something we do when we don't have anything else to do, something to support after we have everything else we need. We take the message of Jesus, and we omit some of the more intense parts because they might scare people away. We reduce the expectations: *You don't have to do anything different. Just believe.*

Jesus offers us grace and love without condition, but not without expectation.

As people of faith, I think we've tamed those expectations, we've *tamed* the life changing, always surprising, risk-taking power of a relationship with Jesus.

Anyone in marketing worth their salt should know that people don't put much value on things that are cheap and easy. When we sell people on a Jesus who's easy to follow,

can we really blame them for drifting off, for thinning out when things don't go the way they expect?

Being a committed disciple of Jesus is the greatest adventure that can be had on this earth, and it's the most fulfilling life we could ever have, but it's also the most difficult. It's not for wimps.

But the more we're emptied of the stuff that comes between us and our relationship with Jesus, the more we empty ourselves of our own ambitions; the richer and more fulfilling our lives will be. It's worth the money, the time, the risk, *all the way through* to the end.

That's the message worth marketing. That's the message we need to teach and preach and live and share.

Let us pray:

Lord, we love life, and we love you — that's the reason we're here. Yet, you call us to a life of commitment that we're not sure we're ready for. Forgive us for saying so, Lord, but this is hard.

Help us to wrestle with the cost of discipleship and whether or not we take seriously our commitment to be your disciples, both individually and as your church.

Help us to be willing to surrender to you whatever is in our lives that obstruct your love for us. Help us surrender to you those things, those parts of our selves, those behaviors and those attachments that prevent your love from filling

our hearts, and our lives. Help us to surrender those things that prevent us from reaching out to touch the lives of others, from sharing the truth of your expectations and the life-changing, risk-taking power that can be found in relationship with you when we live in to that truth.

We need your help, and ask for your help, to accept your invitation to committed discipleship.

Amen.