

Luke 14:25-33 *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.*

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

Have you ever gotten into something and found out that it isn't at all what you expected it would be? I think we've all been there at some point in time. We faced that this summer while on vacation with my family in the Gatlinburg area of Tennessee. We were going to go on hike that was about a 2.7 mile round trip. Unfortunately, we found the road to that trail was closed so we chose the second option which was almost double that length at 5.4 miles. The trail took us to a waterfall that was supposed to be pretty cool so we were excited to get started. What we found out very quickly as we got into the hike was that it was uphill all the way to the waterfall. We didn't know what we were getting into when we started! It didn't take long and some of our group started turning around to wait for everyone else at the car. Not long after that, there started some grumbling and complaining and whining about how far it was and how long until we got there from some who didn't want to turn back...but didn't want to keep going either.

Expectations are everything! Having a realistic knowledge of what to expect in whatever you are going to do helps people to weather the difficult times. It makes you better able to handle things when the going starts to get rough. Knowing fully what it takes in whatever you are doing helps you to keep a good perspective on the situation when things start to go differently than what you thought. It makes it a bit easier to stay level headed and push through when the pain starts to come. It helps you to keep your eyes on the end goal and not on the immediate difficulties right before your eyes. It's better to know what it takes to make it through a situation before you start to help you better manage whatever may come.

The same is true when it comes to discipleship. Discipleship is following after Jesus. Discipleship is more than just believing in Jesus but seeking to follow after him and to become as much like him as is possible. Discipleship is believing in Jesus to the point where you are willing to conform your entire life and your entire thinking to be like his, where you seek to see things his way and from his perspective, and where you seek to stand firm on what Jesus says despite the challenges you might face. There are many in our world who follow after Jesus for all of the wrong reasons. Whether they follow Jesus hoping for a life of ease and glory or they follow him hoping for him to bless them with many good things, these people can easily become disillusioned when faced with the challenges and difficulties a life of true discipleship for Jesus can bring. Jesus has never been deceptive and withheld the realities from his people. He has never tried to deceive people into following him by keeping from them the hardships that would come and making unrealistic promises that lead only to disappointment. On the contrary, Jesus states it all in advance and wants us to be fully informed about what it takes to follow him right from the start. So today our eyes are opened and we are encouraged to **Know What it Takes to Follow Jesus.**

We might be a bit confused by Jesus' first words: *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.* Really? Hate? That doesn't sound like Jesus. He isn't about hate. Jesus is all about love, isn't he? What in the world could Jesus mean by starting with hate? And hate your family, that really doesn't sound like Jesus. The word hate offends us. We are taught not to hate today. The mantra of the world is to hate nothing and love everything. The word hate even sounds harsh to our ears and seems to be at odds with other commands of Jesus to love, even to love our enemies. Some may even try to soften that word or explain it away as a bad translation of what Jesus said. Yet the word Jesus used means to hate—to strongly dislike with the implication of aversion or hostility, to detest. He means hate! So why would he start this way?

Jesus is using strong language to intentionally shock his hearers to help them understand that nothing dare come before him in the life of a disciple. Remember, we are more than members in a church. Jesus wants us to be disciples of him. He not only wants us to believe in him, but to follow him and become like him not only in our thoughts but in our words and actions as well. But he uses strong language to make his point that following him does not mean an easy road here on this earth. In fact, it means just the opposite. Following Jesus can be a hard difficult road. You may have to make some hard decisions about with whom you associate and with whom you spend your time. Jesus doesn't want to scare you this morning nor dissuade you from following him. He just wants you to be aware of what it means to follow him and to have an understanding of what to expect. He wants you to know what it takes to follow him.

So he lays out three conditions for following him. First, there must be a willingness to leave behind family ties including a tie to oneself to follow after Jesus. Whatever contradicts or prevents discipleship is to be hated, not just disliked or disapproved. This holds true in the immediate family as well. If there is a family member who is contradicting Jesus or preventing you from continuing in your discipleship, you are to be ready to break ties if necessary. That sounds harsh. Yet it helps us to understand just what it means to put Jesus as first in your heart. A person can love his mother as a mother, yet at the same time hate his mother as one who stands in the way of discipleship. That may seem like a harsh choice, but it emphasizes for us what it means for Jesus to be number 1 in our hearts. It emphasizes the lengths we are willing to go to follow after him. If it comes down to a choice between a loved one or Jesus, the choice should be obvious. We can love the person but hate them when they stand in the way of discipleship.

It's too easy for us to get comfortable with sin and with people who pull us away from what God says is right. Then sin doesn't bother us or offend us. It's something that we are neutral to or even start to support and defend a person's right to continue in their sin. Maybe we are even tempted to fall into that sin ourselves. Being a disciple of Jesus doesn't mean just following Jesus at a distance going in vaguely the same direction Jesus is going in. It means loving what he loves and hating what he hates. Quite frankly, God hates sin. It doesn't matter if it is lying, gossiping, ruining someone's good name with slander, drunkenness, cursing, cheating on your spouse, homosexuality, stealing, murder, fraud, whatever. It doesn't matter. God hates sin. He doesn't want us cozying up to it, getting comfortable with it, or even being ok with others doing it. He wants us to hate sin and be offended by sin to the point where we are willing to give up friendships or relationships if they stand in the way of our discipleship.

Second, Jesus says that we must be willing to carry our cross. The word cross can stand for many different things. We can see our crosses as any hardship that we have to face in life. Even the best of God's people will experience troubles, tragedies, and situations that leave you wondering—is this really happening and is it really happening to me? These can range from sicknesses to relationship problems to difficulties at work and financial problems at home. But when used in this context, cross means those things we specifically face because we follow Jesus. These are the hardships that come because we are living our lives as disciples of Jesus. It might be the mockery and ridicule that we will undoubtedly face because we have hated those sins which I mentioned earlier which God hates but which are loved by the world around us. Ironically, people are willing to separate from you for holding tightly to what God says even if you aren't willing to separate from them for embracing what God hates. You might be charged as unloving for being unwilling to just accept people as they are and not speak out against their sin. People will scoff at you for holding to high standards in your moral and ethical behavior. They will call you closeminded that you would so callously say that there is only one way to salvation and that is through Jesus alone. You could be ostracized from the culture and society in which you live and associate for being a Christian. You might be a minority in your beliefs and be afraid to share your thoughts for fear of retribution. Maybe we don't face the physical pain and persecution that Christians in the past have had to face for their faith. But we bear crosses for Christ nonetheless, and following him means willingly bearing those crosses.

Third, to follow him and be his disciples, Jesus says we are to be willing to give up all our earthly possessions. This seems like a scorched earth policy. This seems a bit extreme and out there. God surely wouldn't ask us to do this to follow him, would he? He gave us what we have. We need much of what we have to sustain our life. God wouldn't ask us to give all of that up to follow him, would he? Yes, he does. You remember the rich young man who asked Jesus what he needed to do to be saved? Jesus told him to keep the commandments. The young man claimed to have done that. Then Jesus told him to sell all that he had and give it to the poor and then he could follow him. Do you remember how that ended? The young man went away sad because he had great wealth. He loved his wealth more than he loved Jesus. The price to follow Jesus was too much for this young man. Unfortunately, that decision would cost this man everything. Rejecting Jesus for his money and wealth meant also rejecting the salvation which Jesus came to offer. But this really gets us to the main issue before us—if it comes down to money or Jesus, to family or Jesus, to ease and luxury or Jesus, as disciples of Jesus we are to be ready to give it all up to follow after Jesus.

Why? Why would we do this? I read that discipleship, like building a tower as is used in the illustration of our text, is a major project. The disciple's whole life is to be a grand, lofty monument to God's glory. Why would we make this commitment to deny ourselves and build our whole life as a grand, monument to God's glory? Why would we choose pain instead of pleasure, sacrifice instead of luxury? Why? Why would we do this? Just look at what Jesus has sacrificed for you and what he has waiting for you. Look at the cross and what Jesus was willing to bear for you. Just these last two weeks in Catechism class and our Bible information Class, we've been talking about all that Jesus passively faced for you and for me. He did choose this. He chose to give up the streets of heavenly gold for the manure in a Bethlehem stable. He chose to set aside his divine power and glory and allow sinful humans treat him as less than a person and a monstrous criminal. He allowed them to beat him, whip him, crucify him. He allowed his heavenly Father to fully abandon him and leave him all alone to face the pangs of hell. He didn't have to. He could have said no. Yet he denied himself and chose this path. Why? For you. And me. This was the only way God's justice against sin could be satisfied and your salvation could be possible. That's how much God loves you. This is how much God wants you to be with him forever. Because of this God fully forgives your sins and graciously promises that you will live with him forever.

He sacrificed so much for us. He asks us simply to reflect his love for us in our love for him as we continue to grow in our discipleship and live our lives for him. The challenges we face are not because God has left us or abandoned us. They serve only to drive us to despair of our own resources and to rely on our Savior. They remind us that we are insufficient on our own to bring about salvation and drive us into the arms of our Savior. He will supply all that is needed to build the tower of life and win the crown of victory.

No, it isn't an easy road to live as a disciple of Jesus. There is a cost to discipleship and we do well to count the cost. We do well to see the reality and know that these types of troubles and challenges are what we should expect as disciples of Jesus. Knowing this means we won't be caught off-guard when these challenges come. We won't let our allegiance to Jesus grow cold when the going gets tough. We won't follow him with a half-hearted commitment that will lead us to jump ship when the pain comes and we are forced to make the difficult decisions. No, we can face all of this with the certainty that God loves us, that Jesus is always with us, and that while life might not necessarily be better here as God's people, it will be infinitely better eternally because of him. Know what it takes to follow Jesus. Then follow him with a willing and joyful heart focused on the life he has waiting for you. Amen.