

What Are You Willing To Give?

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

September 3 & 4, 2016

Last in a five-part series

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Luke 14:25-33 (NRSV)

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

*Jesus made it clear that there is a very real cost to being his disciple, for there would be
crosses to bear, figurative and not. What cost do we bear?*

Do we even grasp what Jesus means?

Eyes wide open

Have you ever volunteered for a project without really realizing what you were taking on. Perhaps people were afraid to tell you the whole story for fear that you'd back out if you knew the truth. Or perhaps in your own enthusiasm, you simply failed to think it through. At one time or another, most of us have probably said to ourselves, “What have I gotten myself into!?” In today's passage from Luke, Jesus ensures that no one could accuse him of misleading his disciples about the path they had chosen.

The long and winding road

Today's passage is another in the long section of Luke's Gospel that narrates Jesus' final journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. In 9:51, Luke tells us that Jesus “set his face to go to Jerusalem.” It is impossible to tell from Luke's account exactly how long Jesus took to reach Jerusalem, but the journey was by no means direct. Along the way, Jesus teaches and heals. He sends out seventy others who are to go ahead of him to every town Jesus planned to visit himself. At times, Jesus withdraws from the growing crowds; at others, he is beset by large crowds. In today's passage, Jesus has attracted large crowds. But in the midst of their enthusiasm, Jesus turns to confront them.

Hating??

Jesus pulls no punches with the crowds. They may be caught up in the excitement of Jesus' journey, but they better understand the cost of discipleship: there can be no higher priority than Jesus. If Mom calls and says to give up the journey and come home, Jesus warns that you better be prepared to hang up the phone. Jesus comes before mother . . . or father . . . or siblings . . . or even life itself. Jesus' talk of “hate” is not about malice or hostility toward our parents nor is it about self-loathing. It is about being willing to turn away from anyone or anything that would pull us away from Jesus. But there is more.

For you and me, Jesus' talk about carrying a cross (v. 27) is a figure of speech. For anyone in the crowd that day, the cross was a stark reality. Some in the crowds would have been old enough to remember more than twenty years before when the Romans had crucified thousands of Galilean Jews. The rest would have been told the story. The horror of crucifixion was a very real possibility for anyone who continued on with

Jesus. You and I may not face death as a consequence of our faith in Christ, though some Christians still do. For us, the question is whether we can even recognize that there is a cost to our discipleship. If we believe there is no cost, then we are not hearing Jesus. As he said, “Let anyone with ears to hear listen” (Luke 14:35). Alan Culpepper gives us a lot to chew on when it comes to bearing the cross:

Have you ever made a commitment to an organization or committee without first finding out all that would be expected of you? Have you ever gotten caught by purchasing something or joining a book club without first reading all the fine print? Jesus warned would-be followers about the cost of discipleship.

Some churches, preachers, and TV programs present the gospel as though they were selling a used car. They make it sound as easy as possible, as though no real commitment were required. Jesus’ call was far different. He was not looking for superficial commitment or a crowd of tagalongs. Instead, he required his followers to be totally committed if they were going to follow at all.

The language of cross bearing has been corrupted by overuse. Bearing a cross has nothing to do with chronic illness, painful physical conditions, or trying family relationships. It is instead what we do voluntarily as a consequence of our commitment to Jesus Christ. Cross bearing requires deliberate sacrifice and exposure to risk and ridicule in order to follow Jesus. This commitment is not just to a way of life, however. It is a commitment to a person. A disciple follows another person and learns a new way of life.

In a sense, no one can know whether he or she will be able to fulfill a commitment to discipleship. Jesus was not asking for a guarantee of complete fidelity in advance, however. If he had, no one would qualify to be a disciple. Through these parables, Jesus was simply calling for each person who would be a disciple to consider in advance what that commitment requires.

Cultural accommodation of the Christian faith has progressed steadily in recent years. As a result, many see no tension between the teachings of Jesus and the common aspirations of middle-class Americans. On the contrary, a complete change of priorities, values, and pursuits is required. Paul wrote that in Christ we become not just nice people but new creations (see 2 Cor 5:17). When Jesus turned and saw the crowd following him, he was not impressed by his own success. He

Jesus Knows?

Today’s study leads to a question that we often end up discussing at length in my Bible classes. The question comes down to this: “What did Jesus know and when did he know it?” How much did he really know about the road ahead?

When it comes to Jesus, we struggle to understand our proclamation that Jesus is fully God and fully human. It is a worthwhile struggle but, in the end, we cannot really make sense of it. When we try too hard, we end up making regrettable mistakes.

Many of the people in my classes tend to over-emphasize Jesus’ divinity at the expense of his humanity. For them, when Jesus warns his disciples about the road ahead, it is because he sees the future in much the same way that you and I know what is coming in a movie we’ve already seen. After all, if God knows the future and Jesus is God, then isn’t it logical to believe that Jesus knew the future in a way that you or I never could? It may seem logical, but it is not correct. In a letter to the Philippians, Paul wrote that Jesus “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave . . . in human likeness” (2:7).

Jesus was not born knowing how to read. He had to be taught the same way all children are taught. When Jesus asked his disciples whether they were ready to bear the cost of discipleship, he was not looking into some sort of crystal ball. Jesus knew that he was on a collision course with the temple leadership and the Romans. And he knew that he would not abandon the vocation given him by the Father. Jesus knew that he would be “obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross” (Phil 2:8). But would his disciples?

was not interested in the casual, easy acceptance the crowd offered.

The cost of discipleship is paid in many different kinds of currency. For some persons a redirection of time and energy is required, for others a change in personal relationships, a change in vocation, or a commitment of financial resources; but for each person the call to discipleship is all consuming. A complete change in priorities is required of all would-be disciples. No part-time disciples are needed. No partial commitments are accepted.¹

Two fools

Jesus was such a great teacher. So often, he would make his point by telling a story and usually a brief story at that. Jesus didn't use parables because he wanted to obscure his message but because he wanted to illuminate his message. We can participate in Jesus' stories in a way that we could never participate in a saying or some sort of theological explanation.

After confronting the crowd with the cost of discipleship, Jesus tells two brief parables to illustrate a simple point: only fools would start a project without being pretty sure they could finish it. None of us would build a new house without understanding the costs and doing all we could to ensure that we could finish the job. Similarly, using a military analogy, Jesus notes that no wise king would wage war without the prospect of victory.

But could we ever be sure that we can pay the cost of discipleship? No, of course not. Peter would deny Jesus three times. But still, our call to discipleship is to be all consuming. This can be no half-hearted commitment. No part of our lives can be excluded from this commitment, including our wallets and relationships and, as Jesus pointedly notes, our possessions (v. 33).² I sometimes hear people (including myself!) use the term "committed Christian." I guess I know what we mean, but it is deeply regrettable that we feel the need to say it. "Committed Christian" ought to be a redundancy. Let us pray that it is so with each of us.

The Cost of Discipleship

By Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Bonhoeffer was executed by the Nazis in April, 1945, for his part in an attempt on Hitler's life. *The Cost of Discipleship* (1937) is his most well-known book. Had Bonhoeffer been in the crowd on the day that Jesus turned and confronted his disciples, he would have understood Jesus' talk of crosses. Listen to these words, written as the Nazi darkness fell across Germany:

"Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves . . . Grace without price; grace without cost! The essence of grace, we suppose, is that the account has been paid in advance; and, because it has been paid, everything can be had for nothing. . . . Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline. . . . Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate . . ."

"Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field . . . it is the pearl of great price . . . it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his net and follows him. . . . Costly grace is the gospel which must be *sought* again and again, the gift which must be *asked* for, the door at which a man must *knock*. . . . it is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. . . . Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son. . . . Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life."

¹ Culpepper, R. A. (1994–2004). The Gospel of Luke. In L. E. Keck (Ed.), *New Interpreter's Bible* (Vol. 9, pp. 293–294). Nashville: Abingdon Press.

²The Greek verb translated "give up" literally means "to say farewell to," as in waving goodbye!

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. What do you think some people mean when they use the phrase “committed Christian?” What are they trying to convey? In your own experience what are some visible differences between those who seem more committed disciples of Jesus Christ and those who seem not? What leads some people to be more committed than others?
2. Make a list of ten “costs” of discipleship that might be faced by a person in our church. How hard is it to come up with ten? In his reflections on today’s passage from Luke, Dr. Culpepper writes “Cultural accommodation of the Christian faith had progressed steadily in recent years. As a result, many see no tension between the teachings of Jesus and the common aspirations of middle-class Americans.” Do you agree with Dr. Culpepper? If so, how could we begin to recognize the tension, to recognize the cost of discipleship? If you don’t agree with Dr. Culpepper, why not? What do you see as being the major points of tension that *do* exist between Christ’s teachings and our ambitions?

Daily Bible Readings

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

Monday, 1 Kings 19:19-21 Elisha gives up everything (and he has a lot!) to follow Elijah. He slaughtered his livestock so that he can never go back.	Tuesday, Luke 14:34-35 These verses immediately follow today’s reading. What do you think Jesus means by this analogy to salt?
Wednesday, Luke 9:18-27 Peter’s confession of Jesus as the Messiah and the demands of discipleship.	Thursday, Philippians 3:7-11 Everything we think we might lose for the sake of Christ is the loss of so much “rubbish”
Friday, Acts 6:8 – 8:1 Stephen must confront the cost of his discipleship. He was the first of Jesus’ followers to be executed.	Weekly Joys and Concerns

Scott Engle’s Weekday Bible Classes

Join us whenever you can. Each week’s lesson stands on its own. This is very “drop-in.” Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible. On occasion Scott has to cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check www.scottengle.org to make sure the class is meeting.

Monday Evening Class

We will begin Genesis on Sep 12

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

We are studying the Gospel of Luke

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

NOTE: These two classes are on hiatus and should resume the week of September 11.

Scott’s 10:50 Sunday Class in Festival Hall

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

Scott’s Weekly Bible Studies are available at www.standrewumc.org. Just go to “worship” and then “sermons.” You’ll find the study with each week’s recorded sermon. There is also a complete archive of the studies at www.scottengle.org