

COUNT THE COST!
LUKE 14:25-33
SERMON

Today I want to speak about the fear of commitment to discipleship, or following Jesus Christ. Fear of commitment seems to be rampant in our culture today. People fear commitment to just about everything: discipleship or following Jesus, marriage, long-term financial investments, family responsibilities, and the church. Consider fear of commitment to marriage. The percentage of people living together in our country has skyrocketed in the past forty years. Getting married just isn't as popular as it once was in our culture.

Consider fear of commitment to the church. One-third of the adults who attend our church have not committed themselves to church membership. Why? The reasons for avoiding church membership vary in scope and intensity. In reflecting on the numerous excuses I've heard over the years for avoiding church membership, fear of commitment to the church seems to be at the heart of many of these excuses.

Jesus speaks about fear of commitment to discipleship in our Biblical text this morning. When I use the term "discipleship" I mean following Jesus, learning to be a disciple or follower of Jesus. Jesus knows that many people wanting to follow him will be afraid of making a total commitment of their lives to him.

People seem to like the *idea* of Jesus as a good teacher, one who took care of people, a lover of people. We like the idea of believing in Jesus, of enjoying eternal life and having our sins forgiven. But committing our lives totally to him makes many people nervous, fearful and apprehensive. Nevertheless, Jesus makes it very clear that following him requires a total commitment of our lives! Let me say it plainly: **following Jesus requires a total commitment of our lives to him!** Jesus said in **Luke 14:27: "And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple"**. He clarifies this statement in **vs. 33 "In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple"**. Did you hear what he said? Jesus said we must give up *everything* to be his disciple! What a radical call! Committing our lives to Jesus, following him as one of his disciples, costs us everything! Have you given up everything to follow Jesus?

Jesus issues a strong command to give up everything in order to follow him. Yet, we respond fearfully to his strong command. So, the question becomes: *how do we overcome this fear of commitment to discipleship?* First, we avoid the temptation to deny our fear. Some people refuse to admit they fear commitment to discipleship. Let me suggest that rather than deny fear of discipleship, we embrace it. Once we embrace it, we can conquer it with God's help. Listen to these beautiful words from the apostle John in his first letter: **"there is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because He first loved us."** (1st John 4:18,19) Earlier, in the same letter John writes **"Dear Friends, let us love another, for love comes from God"** (1st John 4:7) Here's what we do with the fear of commitment to discipleship, of following Jesus: we ask God, the author of love, by the power of his Holy Spirit to drive fear out of our hearts with his perfect love! With God's help, this fear of commitment to Jesus can be conquered!!

Jesus tells us in Luke 14 that we must count the cost of discipleship. Our fear of commitment to discipleship will be mitigated or lessened if we understand what it costs. Jesus uses two different metaphors to communicate this point. **In vs.28-30** we read of someone wanting to build a tower. Jesus asks rhetorically, **“Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?”** If he doesn’t count the cost and he runs out of money before completing the tower, he runs the risk of ridicule and embarrassment.

The second metaphor Jesus uses concerns a king preparing for war. Look in your Bible in **vs.31-32** A wise king counts the cost. He considers the strength of his army compared to the enemy. If he determines that he will surely lose the war, he opts to send a peace delegation instead.

Counting the cost of any project reduces fear and helps us succeed in completing the project. Counting the cost of commitment to following Jesus helps reduce the fear of our commitment and helps us succeed as Christ’s disciples. Jesus makes it clear that following him, being real disciples, has a very high price: it costs us everything we have!

Have you ever bought something without counting the cost carefully before you made your purchase? I remember buying a very used Mazda pickup thirteen years ago. It had 170,000 miles on it. I paid \$2,000 for it. What a piece of junk! It didn’t run well, it didn’t look good and to this day, I don’t know why I bought it! As a matter of fact, it looked and smelled so bad that Sally and the kids wouldn’t even ride in it! I kept it for a year and sold it. In hindsight I determined that I had not carefully counted the cost of buying that pick-up. I just went out and bought it. What a mistake!

Jesus tells us that we first count the cost of our commitment to discipleship, to following him. Many of the people in this congregation have made a commitment to Jesus Christ. I imagine our experience in counting the cost *before* we made the commitment to Christ varies widely. Some of you made the commitment with very little thought of the actual cost, like the way I bought my pick-up. Others considered the cost carefully before you actually committed your lives to Jesus. Regardless of your experience in counting the cost of commitment to following Jesus, we must face the fact that *continuing* in our Christian lives requires a total commitment of our lives to Jesus. What, exactly will it cost?

1.Total commitment to Jesus costs our family relationships. Look in your Bibles in **Luke 14:26, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters-yes, even his own life-he cannot be my disciple”**. Jesus doesn’t want us to literally hate our family members. In Matthew’s version of this same text he quotes Jesus, **“Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:37**

Luke uses hyperbole, a figure of speech, to communicate the exact same point as Matthew. Hyperbole is a literary genre that uses exaggeration to make a point. Jesus’ point concerns renunciation. We must renounce the primary place of family relationships in order to follow Jesus.

Jesus issues a radical call! He tells us we must put him first in our lives! Jesus must have the pre-eminence, even above those people in our lives we hold the most dear.

Does Jesus have pre-eminence in your life? Does he have first place? Jesus tells us if we love our family more than him we cannot be his disciples.

Turn back in your Bible to **Genesis 22:1**. **“Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!” “Here I am” he replied. Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, Issac, whom you love and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about... When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Issac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!” “Here I am” he replied. “Do not lay a hand on the boy” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son”.**

Abraham found a ram in the thicket and offered the ram to God instead of Issac. Observe Abraham’s willingness to give up the most precious person in his life to God. Abraham exercised a strong faith in God as he obeyed God’s test. He had experienced the love of God so powerfully that the fear of following God and being obedient to him didn’t exist. Abraham’s faith and the love God poured into his heart conquered his fear!!

God can do the same with us! As we surrender areas of our lives to him, our faith builds and God’s love grows in our hearts. As this happens, God’s love drives out our fear, including fear of commitment to following him. We also see in Luke 14:

2. Total Commitment to Jesus costs our life!

Turn back to **Luke 14:27**. Jesus said **“And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple”**. Remember, the cross signified death. When Jesus speaks of carrying a cross he doesn’t mean suffering for him, he means *dying* for him! Jesus means dying to our selfish interests, plans, hopes and dreams. Our selfish interests and plans can be just about anything: a dream to become an Olympic athlete, a dream to marry by the time we’re twenty-five, the wish to retire in the next five years, a plan to start a new business, the hope to sell one’s house and downsize; the plans can be just about anything!

Commitment to following Jesus requires giving up our lives. But many of us fear making this total commitment of our lives to God. Are you afraid of giving up your plans to God? Are you afraid that God won’t let you accomplish your intended goals? Remember, God has the very best in mind for us. He loves us and has a great plan for our lives. So, if God directs you in a different way than what you anticipated, He’s doing it for your good. God knows what’s best for you!

Minor league outfielder Grant Desme of the Oakland A’s has willingly given up his life for God. Grant Desme won the MVP award last fall in the Arizona Fall League. He batted .315 with 11 homers, and 27 RBI’s. Some believed the A’s were planning to invite Desme to attend big league spring training this month but that won’t be happening. You see, Grant Desme decided that God wanted him to become a Catholic priest. He said this about baseball, “ I was doing well at ball. But I really had to get down to the bottom of things. I wasn’t at peace with where I was at. I love the game but I aspire to higher things. I have no regrets”. He aspires to higher things because he has given up his life for

God. I loved the title of the article about this young man, which I found on the web at SI.com. The title of the article was, “A’s lose prospect to higher league”. Indeed!

I’m so proud of Hayley Nicholls, a young woman who grew up in our church who serves today in a Christian orphanage in South Africa. Hayley works with children who have lost parents to AIDS. She teaches them about Christ through art projects, songs and Bible stories. Several weeks ago I officiated at her great-grandmother’s Memorial Service and we were able to set up a web cam here in our Multi-Purpose room so Hayley could watch the service. God has called Hayley to serve in a mission that desperately needs her, and she has a heart that’s tender for God. Hayley has given up her life for God. Finally,

3. Total Commitment to Jesus costs everything we have!

Look in your Bible in **Luke 14:33** “**In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple**”. Jesus spoke about giving up our family relationships, our life and now he issues a call to give up *everything* we have. Jesus says that we must give up everything we have. By this he means our jobs, money, homes, all of our recreational and electronic stuff, every conceivable material item! Jesus wants all of it! Why does Jesus want all of our stuff?

Jesus wants our stuff so we can be free to follow him completely. Jesus doesn’t need our stuff. He wants us to be free from it. Dependence on the things of this world makes us less effective as Christians. Look in the next two verses: “**Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. He who has ears, let him hear**”.

Salt had several important functions in Jesus’ day. It served as a preservative. They didn’t have refrigeration so people would rub meat with salt to preserve it and keep it from rotting. Salt also flavored food, much like we use it today. Salt was a common substance in Israel. The Dead Sea has an incredibly high concentration of salt. When the group from our church visited Israel several years ago we floated in the Dead Sea. Anyone can float in the Dead Sea! It doesn’t require any talent. I floated so well, due to the high concentration of salt that I could have read a newspaper while floating on my back!

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus called his followers the “salt of the earth”. We read in **Matthew 5:13**, “**You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men**”.

Jesus calls his followers, “the salt of the earth”. Jesus makes it very clear that we can lose our effectiveness as his followers. We can fail to preserve the truth that we know in Christ, we can fail to flavor our communities with godly influence, and we can fail to create spiritual thirst. Listen carefully: ***We lose our saltiness by clinging to our things.*** When we hold tightly to material goods such as our homes, jobs, recreational toys, money and stuff, we look just like the world. When we look like the world, we fail to win people to God. So, Jesus calls us to give up everything we have!

Have you given up everything to follow Jesus or are you afraid to take this step? The fear of committing our lives to Jesus, giving up everything for him can be overcome! We conquer this fear by asking God, the author of love, to pour out his love in our hearts and drive out fear. We give up our family relationships, our lives and everything we have.