

**Proper 18, Year C (RCL) — Luke 14:25-33**  
**The Rev. Craig A. Phillips, Ph.D.**  
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This is one of those Sundays on which a smart preacher would have found someone else to preach. If I had realized sooner I was going to be preaching today on the lessons selected by the Revised Common Lectionary, I might have seen if I could work it out to have someone else preach. As it is, I am the only clergy person here today.

Our gospel reading today has two of what are called the "difficult sayings" of Jesus, all in one short selection from the gospel of Luke. "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," is the first "difficult saying." The second is, "none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions." Who of you would want to try to explain those passages? Who of us really wants to hear these words? They truly are difficult sayings for those of us who desire to be disciples of Jesus, who want to follow Jesus.

When I was first ordained, I used to try to explain the passages away as best I could. I wanted in other words, to show that they really were not as threatening or difficult as they sounded. I tried, for example, to play down the word "hate" as a kind of Middle Eastern hyperbole and gave this passage the best spin I could give it. I learned that try as I may to lessen the impact of these words of Jesus, they still were offensive to some people in the pew. I no longer try to play down these words of Jesus. They are what they are. I do, however, hope this morning to put them into a context that at least helps us to hear them so that we in turn can be challenged by these difficult words of

Jesus. If we truly are to become a follower of Jesus, we have to work at it. We will have to dedicate ourselves to this task. After all Jesus is the one who says to all who would follow him, "Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."

To illustrate the meaning of his difficult words, Jesus tells two separate stories. They are stories about the cost of discipleship. There is a cost to following Jesus and we had better be aware of it, before we begin the journey. It will mean an end to our own self-centeredness. It will mean an end to our attempts to make everything about ourselves. It will mean that we can no longer call our own selves, "Number 1." It will mean that we will have to deny ourselves the vanity of thinking that the world revolves around us and our activities and we will have to admit that we follow another who ultimately is our boss—who really and truly **is** Number 1—and that is our Lord Jesus Christ. If we are to follow him we must deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him to the places where he leads us.

Jesus knew that those who followed him were going to be put at risk. He continually warned them that as he suffered, so they might suffer. The reaction to Jesus' peaceful message was often open hostility and violence. Jesus knew that just as he would suffer persecution and the possibility of execution for what he taught and for what he did, so would those who followed him.

He wanted those who decided to follow him to count the cost first, before they decided to follow him. In our gospel reading today Jesus give two examples of people who did not count the cost beforehand and so failed in their appointed tasks.

The first example is addressed the hearer of his words: "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?" You would estimate the cost, wouldn't you to see if you have enough resources to finish building it? You would not want to lay the foundation and then run out of money before you finished it, would you?

The second story is about a king who did not properly take into account the strength of his enemy's forces before he went to war against the enemy. If he had, he might have sued for peace, rather than face a military defeat.

In both cases, the failure to measure the cost, led to a failure to finish the task at hand, be it the building of a tower or winning the war. Similarly the failure to measure the cost of following Jesus would mean that the disciple might not be able to be faithful right up to the end of his or her life.

To make further sense of this gospel reading, we ought to remember that this passage immediately follows the story of those who refused to attend the banquet to which they had been invited. (The banquet is a symbol of the Kingdom of God.) One could not attend because of his newly acquired possessions, another because he had recently married and now was taken up with pleasing his bride. In this story family and possessions got in the way of answering the call of Jesus, of answering the invitation to become a disciple of Jesus and so enter into the Kingdom of God.

One thing we need to remember when we hear these difficult sayings is that families in Jesus' day were not envisioned in the terms of love to which we are accustomed today. Marriages were arranged. They were not a result of romantic love or the result of the choice both parties made for the other. Marriages were arranged. Children were seen as an economic necessity. Love was not necessarily part of the picture. Families were large and inter-generational economic units. The patriarch of the

family was understood to be the owner of his wife and his children—and everything they did referred directly back to him. For a man, as long as his father was alive, he was in some way still subservient to him.

Jesus' message, as we know, also divided families. Everyone at the time did not agree that Jesus was the Messiah. Nor does everyone today. Families were divided by their commitment or lack of commitment to Jesus. The cost of following Jesus for these first generation of Christians often meant breaking ties with their parents, or their wife, or their children. Jesus says, in other words, "if you desire to be my disciple, you will have to renounce the claims of family over you." If you do not do that, and first count the cost—the cost that the family might end up being divided by the decision to follow Jesus—then you will be like the unsuccessful builder or the defeated king. Jesus says, first count the cost, and then if you are able, come and follow me.

The same is true with our possessions. If they are going to have a primary claim over you and your life, Jesus says, you cannot be my disciple. "You cannot serve two masters." So count the cost and then decide if you are ready to follow Jesus.

Our gospel passage this morning, above all reminds us that we are called to be disciples of Jesus and not merely admirers of Jesus. Admirers pick and choose what they like about Jesus and his teachings. They like the Golden Rule and Jesus' emphasis on how we should love our neighbors. They like the things that are easy to hear but nothing that is too difficult or challenging. But when it comes to Jesus' demands that we love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, or when we are told that we are not to strike back at someone who has hurt us, but rather that we are to turn the other cheek, that is too much to ask. When it comes to Jesus' teaching about non-violence, the call to

renounce our possessions, his insistence that ties to family and nation come second to God, and his insistence that the cross is the ultimate destination of our journey, the admirer of Jesus gets cold feet.

Remember you are called to become Jesus' disciples, not one of his admirers. It is a daunting task to become a disciple of Jesus. It asks a lot of you. You are right to have moments when you wonder how serious you really are about your desire to follow Jesus and become his disciple. If you wonder about that, then you know what I am talking about. If you are to become a disciple of Jesus you will have to count the cost to see how ready you really are.

The church is a community of those who seek to become disciples of Jesus and not a community of his admirers who pick and choose what they like about Jesus and his message. The church, however, is not a community of perfect people, so there is hope for all of us who fall short in our efforts at faithful discipleship. At St. Peter's we are in the business of discipleship. Each of us here has a hand in helping another here in this community to become better, more faithful disciples of Jesus. We cannot do this alone. We need one another. The cost of discipleship is daunting and the road is not always easy. With the help of God and of an entire community, we do not journey alone. So don't give up, don't be discouraged. Take the hand of the person next to you and respond in faith to the call of Jesus to become his disciple.

Decide to follow Jesus.