

Luke 14:25-33
September 4, 2016

Every so often, as you read through the Scriptures, you come across passages like this one telling you things you probably don't want to hear. You try as best you can to detour around them, thinking that this one doesn't apply to you, but sometimes you can't. Sooner or later you and I have to come to terms with the reality that following Jesus just might cost you something. Your unchurched friends and neighbours got to sleep in this morning. Every weekend off and no guilt. All that fun you see other people having and you have to miss out.

The Bible talks about grace and God's undeserved love in Christ. Salvation doesn't cost you anything! You knew there was a catch somewhere. After a while you feel kind of betrayed. The miracles that Jesus did to relieve sickness and suffering, want and hunger, they were terrific. The way he always helped everyone and spoke about the love of God for sinners - great stuff! Then Jesus says something like this, "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple." It's like reading the fine print after you've already signed the contract.

Did the disciples know when they started just what they were in for? When they began with Jesus they traveled with Him. They helped control the crowd. They helped with feeding the hungry and tending the sick. Yes, they had left their fishing boats behind, but not permanently. They did go back to them from time to time. They had seen Jesus' power. They had heard His word of authority and they had listened as He taught them and brought them to peace with God.

But here now in Luke 14 as He was beginning to prepare them for what was to come, they probably thought, as we often do, that this being a Christian stuff was pretty easy. You learn about Jesus. You promise with His help to follow Him, to trust him and to live for Him. You learn a few Bible passages. You memorize some catechism and you're in. Jesus has done the major work. He has died for your sins. Then came the day when Jesus sent out His disciples with ominous instructions. Take no extra provisions and take no money. I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Brother will betray brother to death. All men will hate you.

He said things like this: Anyone who comes after me must deny himself. Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. Time and again, Jesus had many customers, many fans, eager to follow and see what He would do next. There were ten lepers who cried out for help and were healed. There was the rich young man who was trying to figure out how to get himself saved, but who walked away sad because he was rich. He thought he would have to give up too much. Salvation was too expensive.

In John 6, after listening to the hard teaching about Jesus being the bread of life, many people stopped following Jesus. It was too hard and too expensive. They were unwilling to give up what they most cherished -but not the twelve. Something had happened to them. There was something different about them. When Jesus asked if they would leave also, they said, "Lord, to whom shall we go, you have the words of eternal life." Earlier in John 6 the people wanted to take Jesus by force and make Him king. Jesus had fed a multitude with 5 loaves and 2 fish. If you give the people what they want, they will follow you.

In case you haven't learned this yet, Jesus doesn't always give us what we want. That means following Jesus will cost you some of your wants. Jesus addressed the words of our text to the crowds who were following Him. They were expecting to hear a Joel Osteen sermon. Follow Jesus and all your wants will be supplied. It's called the prosperity gospel. The message you often hear is this one: "If anyone would come after me and be my disciple, he shall have wealth and honour in abundance." People like what they hear. We go for a kind of commitment that expects only blessings. Then, when things get tough, when our wants are not satisfied, we want to bail out.

Someone once said that "the narrow road is very worn on the edges". We want an easy discipleship and if it doesn't happen, we want to be close enough to the door to get out. Becoming a disciple or a follower of Jesus had been so easy. Being a Christian, being a disciple, being a servant, and an ambassador for Christ, was not going to be so easy. There would be a cost. The cost would be putting Christ and His kingdom first. In fact, they were to

put Jesus so far in first place that second place would look more like last place. What does it mean to take up your cross and follow Jesus? It doesn't mean suffering the consequences of your own sin. It doesn't mean carrying one in your pocket or around your neck or hanging from your ear. It doesn't even mean your own weaknesses or illnesses, like Paul's thorn in the flesh. It means valuing the eternal over the temporary.

It was there in Hebrews 11 a few weeks back. Moses considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. Moses would have to leave something behind. He would leave behind the treasures of Egypt. He would gain something far greater. Jesus left behind the glory of heaven and walked the way to the cross -he was willing to suffer all, even death on that cross and he did it willingly and for the sake of someone else. Jesus did it for you because of His love for you. Jesus' cross was voluntary. He says, "No one takes my life, I lay it down of my own accord."

If our cross is like Jesus' cross, then to "take up your cross and follow Jesus" means to be willing to hurt and suffer and endure and cry for the sake of others. You love them because Jesus loves you. Carrying your cross isn't about earning heaven. It isn't about enduring suffering to make up for sins in your life. It's about having a love for others that reflects in some weak and dim way the love of Jesus for you. Carrying your cross is about the changed heart and the changed life that the Holy Spirit works in you for the sake of others. You see it when you care for someone so much that it hurts. You see it when you shed tears with them and for them because of your Spirit-inspired love for them. Then you are carrying a cross, like Jesus did. Carrying such a cross is voluntary. Are you willing to stand up for the truth, even if it hurts? Are you willing to stand by a friend and risk gently correcting them if you see they are headed down the wrong path? Are you willing to be where the Lord wants you to be instead of where you want to be?

In the epistle today we read about Philemon and Onesimus and about what discipleship was about to cost Philemon. Philemon was a wealthy man who lived in Colossae. He was a Christian and a close and dear friend of Paul. He had servants who lived in his house, and one of them, named Onesimus, stole from him and ran away. Such crimes were punishable by death. After he ran away, Onesimus met Paul and he became a Christian too. So now, here is the dilemma. Onesimus realized his sin and was ready to go back to Philemon. Philemon could treat him as the runaway slave he was and punish him, or he could treat him as the brother in Christ he had now become and forgive him. Was Philemon willing to bear this cost for the sake of Christ?

Let's look at another example. As Paul traveled on his journeys, he was always on the move. Sometimes the opposition ran him out of town. Sometimes he left places where he would have liked to have stayed because the urgency of the Gospel kept him moving to new fields where people hadn't yet heard the good news. He literally left behind people he loved for the sake of the Gospel. He had a zeal for the lost, a heart that hurt for those going to hell. He had a heart that desired to serve the Lord. He was willing to bear the difficulties that were ahead with the willingness that Jesus had when he carried the cross to Calvary.

Consider the believers in the early church. Acts 2 ... they were committed to each other, to meeting together, to learning together, to fellowship together, to praying for each other. They did this not because they had to, but because their love for the Lord made them want to be like Him. Acts 11 ... the church in Antioch was committed to integrating Jews and Gentiles into one congregation. Committed to growing in the word. Committed to helping their sisters and brothers in Christ in Jerusalem when famine came. Committed to a mission plan to send Paul and Barnabas into Galatia and beyond. Paul and Barnabas had been their founding pastors. When they saw the need for mission, their love for the lost required them to send the best they had. How much they would have liked to keep Paul and Barnabas. And how much they would have liked to stay but they willingly took up that cross.

Crosses come when we care so much that it hurts. Crosses come when the Spirit-inspired love in your heart takes Over. Putting Jesus first in your life is really the essence of the first commandment. Have no other gods besides Me. Cling to me above all else. Whatever good thing you lack, look to me for it. Trust in me. I am the one who will satisfy you and help you in every need. Be content with what you have. There is a disease out there that's been around for a long time. It's called "influenza". It is the disease of over-consumption. The Greeks even had a name for it, "philarguria," the love of gold. It's a disease that is marked by the desire to be affluent, to have more

money, more things, more shoes, more tools, more everything. You don't need it, but you want it so much that you can't live without it.

This disease is especially dangerous for two reasons. It leads us away from relying on God for all that we need. It leads us into a love of stuff that hinders our discipleship. Being a disciple of Jesus starts to cost too much. When we have all the things we need, they become our security. When we don't have all that we want or need, we doubt God and despair. Either way, it interferes with our discipleship. Jesus says, put me first, trust me, love me, follow Me. No servant can serve two masters. He will love one and hate the other. Near eastern way of speaking uses love-hate instead of "more than". Hate them means love them less than Christ. It really reminds us that being a disciple of Jesus is an either/or. There is no middle ground. We like to try. Maybe that's why the narrow road is very worn on the edges. We want to follow Jesus for the benefits, but want to have an escape route handy, just in case we need it.

No one, by virtue of his or her own strength is able to be Jesus' disciple. No one, by their own abilities is able to give themselves in perfect love and service to others like Jesus did. Before Jesus ascended to heaven He had two things to say to the disciples. "You will be my witnesses" was the second thing. The first thing was, "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you." He told them to wait for that power, to wait for the Holy Spirit. Without Him you can do nothing. With Him you can do anything. He will empower you and enable you to be disciples.

Following Jesus is not always easy. Sometimes the devil tells us to be the opposite of what Jesus wants us to be. When we listen, that's sin. The good news is that Jesus carried our sins to the cross. He shed His blood for you. He suffered and died for you and rose on the third day. Through Him, God has declared the world righteous. When you were baptized, you were marked with the sign of the cross to show that you were redeemed by Christ the Crucified. You carry the name of Jesus and His forgiveness with you. You also have His help to carry your burdens each day. He says to us, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest." Our life of discipleship is lived under the cross. There we have traded in the burden of sin which we could not carry. In its place Jesus has give us something else, something wonderful. He says in the very next verse, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."