



Lamb of God Lutheran Church – Columbus, Ohio
September 13, 2015 (Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost)

Preacher: Pastor Timothy Wagner

Sermon Text: Luke 14:25-33

Sermon Theme: The Cost of Discipleship

²⁵ *Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said:* 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.* ²⁷ *And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.*

²⁸ *“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it?”* ²⁹ *For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him,* ³⁰ *saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’*

³¹ *“Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not 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, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.”*



We’ve recently talked to a few salesmen about replacement windows for our house. You know how it goes, right? Whether you are deciding on home improvements, purchasing a new car, choosing a college to attend, or buying jewelry, furniture or electronics, the approach doesn’t change much. Someone’s going to point out all of the good things and leave out all of the bad things about their product. They know you are trying to decide whether what they are selling is worth the cost.

I don’t know if Jesus would make a very good salesman. He’s already got large crowds traveling with him. He’s got ‘em hooked. Just keep telling ‘em the good stuff, and they’ll keep following. But it almost sounds like he’s trying to drive people away, like he doesn’t want anyone to follow him. He says, **“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. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple”** (v. 26-27). Then later he adds, **“Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple”** (v. 33).

What kind of a sales pitch is that? You want it? It’s going to cost you everything you have! But Jesus isn’t trying to make a sale here. No, he doesn’t want those who are following him to turn back. He wants them to follow him. But his concern is not just for today, but for tomorrow and the next day and the day after that. Jesus wants us to understand the cost of discipleship, because he wants us to be his disciples from here to eternity. So what is the cost? What does it take? What should we expect? You can do research these days to find out the “true cost of ownership” before you buy certain things. You can know, in addition to the up-front price, what it will cost you, on average, for maintenance or insurance or energy usage, and how long the product will last. Jesus wants us to understand the true cost of discipleship.

In a few minutes four people will stand in front of you and confess their faith and promise to continue steadfast in that faith even to death. In many ways, those promises are the easy part. Keeping them is the hard part. Many of you have stood in front of a congregation and made promises very similar to the ones they will soon make. You know that the “true cost of discipleship” is more than just the time you dedicated to studying the Bible to prepare to make those promises.

Perhaps your confession has caused division, even within your own family, as those we love may deny some or all of what God’s Word says. Perhaps your faith has cost you friends, who want you to prioritize your time and your money and your interests in worldly ways, instead of setting your mind on things above and making them top priority in your life. There’s a cost to following Christ in terms of worldly blessings, since following him means using everything we have to serve and worship him and not to serve ourselves. And, as

the devil continues to plot and scheme against Christ and his Church, we pay the price, as we face persecution, prejudice, and ridicule for living our lives by the light of God's Word.

It's not an easy road, is it? But why does Jesus tell us these things? Why doesn't he just let us find out on our own? I'm convinced there are two main reasons.

First of all, he wants us to know the cost of discipleship, because he wants to show us that we can't cover that cost on our own. Think about Jesus' illustrations in these verses. Someone has in mind to build a big tower. But how much does he get done before he runs out of resources? Just the foundation. He wasn't even close to having enough. Or a king is going to war against an army twice as big as his. Now, unless you are like Gideon, whom we talked about a few weeks ago, with the Lord fighting for him, this is not a battle you are likely to win. So, also, if we think we have enough on our own to finish the tower or win the battle, Jesus wants to wake us up and show us the true cost of discipleship. In fact, he says, what you and I have won't cut it. To be his disciples, we need to give up everything we have (v. 33). And that includes all of the good things we can do and all of the personal strength and effort we might put into it. If we cling to those things, we will always fall short. Only by letting go of any claim to our own worthiness or strength can we truly follow Jesus, who has already done everything that needs to be done for us.

But that's a tough pill to swallow, isn't it? It may be hard for some people to do enough, but I go to church every Sunday. I always put something in the offering plate. I volunteer when I can. I pay my taxes without complaining. I'm a decent person. If following Jesus requires some sacrifice, some good intentions, some effort on my part, maybe I'm up to the task.

But Jesus says no, we're not. Take an honest assessment of your heart and your life, and you'll see that you simply don't measure up. How many times have you buckled under the pressure of persecution? How many times have you made your family more important than your faith in deciding how you will spend your time? How many times have you been hesitant or even refused to give up worldly peace and happiness for the sake of eternal gain? How many times have you put personal pleasure ahead of God's glory in your priorities? If we've done any of these even once, we haven't paid the price required to follow Jesus. We can't do it on our own, no matter how hard we try, and so Jesus says, ***"Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple"*** (v. 33). We can't cling to our own efforts and follow Jesus.

But the good news is, we don't have to. Jesus has accomplished everything for us. Notice that he doesn't say, "Don't bother following me. I don't want people like you." Jesus came into this world to pay the price that we could never pay, to cover the cost toward which our spiritual pockets were empty. Jesus gave everything he had and fulfilled the demands of God's holy law in our place. Jesus sacrificed everything he had so that we could follow him not only in this life but all the way to eternal life. Jesus paid the ultimate price, when he laid down his sinless life on the cross to cover our selfishness and pride, our fear and failure to follow him whole-heartedly.

The price that Jesus paid is proof of his perfect love for us and proof that he wants us to follow him instead of turning back in hopeless despair. And that brings us to the second reason I am convinced he wants us to know the cost of discipleship. And that's that he does not want us to be discouraged when the bill comes.

Jesus once told a parable about how the seed of God's Word works in people's lives. It is snatched away from some hearts by sin and unbelief before it even has a chance to take root. In some, it grows and bears fruit to eternal life. And in others, it some grows initially but, in time of trouble, withers and dies. Jesus doesn't want to see that happen. He wants those who hear his Word and are brought to faith in him to keep following him throughout their lives. He doesn't want trials and troubles to trip us up. He doesn't want the potholes of persecution to push us off the path. He doesn't want the cost to catch us off guard and cause us to turn back from following him.

Yes, because he loves us, he warns us. Because he wants us to walk with him, to learn from him, to sit at his feet as his disciples, and to enjoy the blessings that he purchased with his priceless blood, he tell us what is coming. Calculating the cost, seeing the cross we have to carry, knowing that Christ has already carried his

cross before us and has a crown of life in store for us helps us to keep going. You see, Jesus isn't surprised when we pay a price for living as a Christian in a sinful world. He knows that we will be hated and opposed, just like he was. But he's still in control, using every hurtful moment to draw us closer to him, using every trial to train our eyes heavenward, where he has joys prepared for us that we cannot begin to imagine. He doesn't want us to miss out on what's coming, so he urges us to understand the cost of discipleship, knowing that every penny, every tear, every struggle is worth it and will be forgotten in the amazing glory to come.

No, Jesus is not trying to sell us a bill of goods here. As he told his disciples, "If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first." The road to eternal life will be rough and rocky at times, but Jesus has opened the way for us to follow him. You don't have to cover the cost yourself. He's paid every penny. He simply calls you to follow, promises to stay by your side the whole way, and assures you that heaven is a home worth whatever price you are called upon to pay in this life. So follow him, friends. Not because it's easy, but because the one who loves you most and best invites you to follow and will bring you safely to your journey's end. In his saving name. Amen.

Lessons for September 13

Genesis 12:1-8

¹ The LORD had said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you.

² “I will make you into a great nation
and I will bless you;

I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.

³ I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you.”

⁴ So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. ⁵ He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

⁶ Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷ The LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.

⁸ From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD.

Philippians 3:4b-11

If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.

⁷ But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Luke 14:25-33

²⁵ Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: 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. ²⁷ And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

²⁸ “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? ²⁹ For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, ³⁰ saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’

³¹ “Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not 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, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.”