

Counting the Cost

COMMUNION

September 4, 2022

Psalms 139:1-6 and 139:13-14

You have looked deep into my heart, LORD, and you know all about me. You know when I am resting or when I am working, and from heaven you discover my thoughts. You notice everything I do and everywhere I go. Before I even speak a word, you know what I will say, and with your powerful arm you protect me from every side. I can't understand all of this! Such wonderful knowledge is far above me. You are the one who put me together inside my mother's body, and I praise you because of the wonderful way you created me. Everything you do is marvelous! Of this I have no doubt.

Luke 14:25-33

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

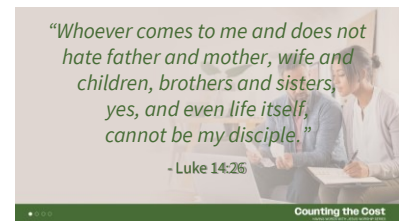


Today we begin a new worship series. It will run through September and is called “Having Words with Jesus.” In this series we aim to listen to Jesus as we proverbially sit at his feet, wrestling with these words, just as the first hearers did.

Our passage from Luke 14 is a challenging passage – one we’d probably rather skip over. So it is a good place to start this series. Today we wrestle with counting the cost of discipleship. We will be called to consider a radical change, to seek to live in the world following kingdom of God principles. As we do so, let us pray...



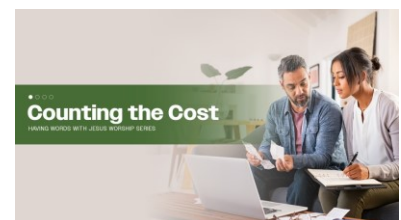
As our passage opens, Jesus is speaking to the large crowd that is traveling with him. Turning to them, Jesus says, *“Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.”* Not going to happen, is it? Being honest here. It just isn’t going to happen. At least not in the usual way that we think about when we read these words. We are good at hating, though. But this is not the list we’d use as the objects of our hate. And in some ways, this command does not align with a lot of what we read elsewhere in the gospels. Jesus speaks again and again about loving and caring for one another, of forgiving one another, of humbly serving one another. These words of hate just don’t fit with a lot of the other words of Jesus. Maybe that’s why we’re tempted to skip passages like this.



So we have two choices. First, we could just ignore it, to pretend we did not read it. Some of you are thinking, “We can’t do that.” But, in reality, we do it all the time. We pretend Jesus did not say a lot of things. We just focus on the doable stuff. We gravitate to the words of Jesus that we like, to the words that affirm and build us up. Although I am tempted to take these approaches at times, this will not be the approach that I take this morning.

These words at first appear to take aim at what, for many of us, is the nearest and dearest people to us – our family. But there are many definitions of ‘family’. One of the nearest and dearest families that I have outside of my immediate family and my church family are my mission trip families. Steve and I began leading mission trips way back in 2012, when we went to Detroit. Since that first trip we have been on trips to Appalachia, to Seattle, to Orlando, to the Navajo Reservation, to Mission, Texas, and to Racine, Wisconsin. COVID drubbed out our next planned trip, to Colorado Springs – two years in a row. The bonds developed on the bus ride, on our individual work teams, and with the group as a whole are powerful and deep. Looking back at pictures I see smiles and hugs. I see teamwork. I see friendships formed that are still important to me three, five, ten years later. Coming together as brothers and sisters in Christ to serve those most in need builds a bond that really lasts. So we must delve down into the text this morning, wrestling with it, searching for understanding.

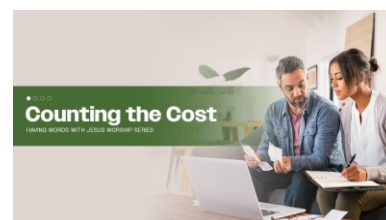
To begin that understanding, let’s look at the two stories about counting the cost that follow these hard opening words. The first is about a man intending to build a tower.



Turning to verse 28, Jesus asks if we would start building a tower without first considering the cost of the tower. We are logical, like Jesus is. Of course we'd first sit down and estimate the cost. Who would want to lay the foundation and then run out of money? We would be ridiculed like that man in Jesus' parable. People would say of us, *"This fellow began to build and was not able to finish."* Ha, ha, ha! We do not like to be ridiculed or to appear foolish, so we plan, and then we plan again. The second story is like the first.

In the second story, a king is headed off to war. As the time for battle draws near, a wise king will sit down and consider if his 10,000 can defeat the king coming against him with 20,000. Jesus says, *"If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace."* A wise king evaluates his situation and makes the best decision for the present situation.

Jesus is asking the crowd, and by proxy us, if they really want to make this journey. He is asking if we want to fight the battle that is coming, if we want to build the tower that Jesus wants us to build. Jesus is asking, are you in or are you out? That is what Jesus is really speaking about when he calls us to hate our mother and father, our wife and children, our brothers and sisters. It is what he is leaning into when he says, *"Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."* The cross is hard to carry. We must count the cost. Before picking it up. Before taking the first steps. We must first count the cost.



Why does Jesus have to make it so hard to follow him? Why can't he just be satisfied with us giving him what time we have left over at the end of the day or week? Why can't we just give when we have time, when we have energy, when we have nothing else to do?

Just before the message, we read responsively from Psalm 139. In these words we were reminded that God knows us inside out and loves us beyond our understanding, better and deeper than we know or love ourselves, yet God gives us the power to make our own decisions. Now, as we consider this call to discipleship, what is our response, what is our decision? Having begun to consider the cost, are we ready yet to pick up our cross so that we can follow Jesus daily?



Turn with me to Jeremiah 18 as we consider our response. In the opening verses Jeremiah is sent to the potter's house. The potter is working at the wheel. But the piece becomes

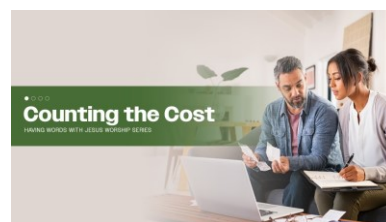
marred or spoiled, so he begins again. As God speaks, Jeremiah comes to understand that the clay is the nation of Israel, and that God is the potter. But there is also a personal connection. Jeremiah realizes that he, like us, is also the clay. Just as God works to shape and form Israel to God's vision for the chosen people, God too works in our lives, seeking to shape and form us into who God created us to be.

And we, like Israel, have a choice. This is part of counting the cost. In verses 7-11, God declares that God will act in accordance with the people's actions. If the people are faithful, turning from their sin and back towards God, then God will be faithful and will spare them the disaster that was coming.

But if the people sin and create distance between God and themselves, then instead of the blessing that God had intended, God will allow disaster to fall upon the people. God does not bring disaster to whole nations like God did in the days of old. But things like want and pride, jealousy and greed, discontentment – these are the fruit of living a worldly life. These are the modern disasters that negatively impact our lives when we choose the way of the world over the way of the cross.

Like Israel, we have a choice. We can choose to be selfish, to live in our sin, to follow the ways of the world. Or... Or... We can surrender to being clay in the potter's hands. We can choose to be built up by God. We can choose to surrender ourselves, to pick up our crosses, to follow this Jesus.

So, my friends, are you willing to be clay in the potter's hands? Are you willing to count the cost and to step forward, once again committing your life to following Jesus as Lord and Savior? Perhaps you are ready to shout "Yes!" or "Sure!" At least right now, in this place and in this moment, safe and secure from all alarms, we are willing to say "yes" to following Jesus.



But what about when things get tough? What about when tragedy strikes? What about when we stumble and fall in our sin? These times are what Jesus is asking us to consider. When we sober up to what Jesus is really asking of us, we can say, 'I want to. But what will it really take?' Jesus will answer, 'Everything. Give it all up. Father, mother, wife, children...' Everything is on this daunting list. Even our own lives.

Our pride and our greed, our gifts and our talents, the things that bring us joy and the things that make us roll our eyes as we sigh. Jesus asks us to give up everything.

Maybe you think that Jesus can't be serious or that I am misreading this week's text. We began this time acknowledging that some of Jesus' words are hard to hear, that some we'd rather ignore or skip past. Too late for that now. Jesus **is** serious. He calls us to follow, carrying the cross upon which hangs father, mother, wife, children, even our own life. Seems impossible? Feels impossible?

It is possible. Because, in essence, Jesus says, "Don't love them with your love; love them with my love. Don't cling to people or things because they meet your needs or serve you. Receive them as a gift from the one you follow, from me."



We must love in this way because we can't love them like they need to be loved on our own. We can't even love father, mother, wife, children, even self like we want to love them. But in his love, we can love them the way Jesus does. Compared to his love working through us, ours is feeble and broken and selfish and temporary and almost looks like hate. So, Jesus calls us to give up that kind of love. It doesn't serve. Instead, we can love as he loves. We can see through his eyes; we can serve with his hands. Then when we pick up, in his love, those we call family, we find more than what we thought we had. Then when we begin to build, we might actually finish, even as we are being finished by the potter's hands.



Jesus is asking us to count the cost, to consider making this radical change, to step into living as Christ, into making the radical difference we are called to make. Jesus calls us to carry our cross, to live in a world with different priorities. As

a means to connect to and affirm this charge from Jesus, during communion we will share in the Wesley Covenant Prayer. The heart of this covenant is the opening line, “I am no longer my own but thine.” These are words of surrender, words of commitment. As we turn to this time of Holy Communion, let us meditate upon counting the cost of discipleship. May we each be found worthy of answering this call. Amen and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. In what area(s) or part(s) of your life are you least willing to be clay in the potter’s hands? How will surrendering lead you deeper into Christ?
- 2) *Pray*. When you consider carrying your cross, what scares or frightens you the most? How can you seek guidance and assurance in prayer?
- 3) *Study*. Read Matthew 10:34-39. How does this give fuller or better understanding of the call to count the cost of following Jesus?