

16<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
"Counting the Cost and Experiencing the Joy"  
Luke 14:25-33  
9/8/13

Have you ever bought something, kind of impulsively, and you find out later that it was something you couldn't really afford? It's kind of embarrassing, but a number of years ago I did that in big way.

I was starting seminary, and even though the seminary had a computer lab where I could go and write papers for my classes, I started to envy some of my classmates who had one of those nice PC's in their dorm rooms. Yes, in 1989 that was a big deal.

I was a student and I didn't have much money, and so I got an idea. I decided to talk to my grandma Sylvia. When I went to see her we visited for a while and then I began telling her about how much I wanted a computer and a printer.

And I was so excited when I saw her nodding her head, that somehow it affected my hearing. You see if you would have been in that room you would've heard her say, "Yes, Marty I can loan you money for that computer."

But somehow, I missed that important word, "Loan."

So when she gave me the check I happily went off and bought that computer. Only to find out, a few months later, that she was waiting for her first payment on her LOAN.

When I started calculating what the computer cost, and what that computer cost, plus interest, it was an eye opening experience. I learned a real lesson about counting the cost.

In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus told the crowds who were following him to count the cost of discipleship.

But let's ask a fair question: What does it mean to count the cost of discipleship?

The first verse of today's gospel tells us that "large crowds were traveling with Jesus," In other words, Jesus had become quite a tourist attraction.

This is Luke, chapter 14.

But back in Luke, chapter four, you might remember, that when Jesus first began his ministry when he gave his first sermon, at the synagogue, in his hometown of Nazareth, he wasn't quite so popular.

In fact, the people drove him right out of the synagogue, and were ready to throw him over a cliff. In other words, his mission was not to be a "crowd pleaser."

But now in Chapter 14, Luke tells us that large crowds were pressing in on him. Maybe they had heard his reputation for healing. John tells us that some were there just to see signs and wonders.

But just then, Jesus turns to the crowd and says:

"Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even life itself, cannot be my disciple. "

"Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."

"What? Outrageous," the crowd murmured.

And they fell into a stunned silence.

I don't know of any more shocking words of Jesus than these - hate father, mother, brothers, sisters, even your own life. What could Jesus possibly mean?

Can this be the same Jesus who said, "Love thy neighbor as thyself"?

"Count the cost," says Jesus. Before you launch a building project, you first figure out how much you will need to finish the job.

There once was a family in the Midwest that decided to build a new home.

They built the foundation and the basement and the floor over the basement.

They covered that floor with weatherproof material and moved into the basement until the house was finished.

Then they spent the next 18 years living in that basement because they hadn't counted the cost in time or money.

After Jesus tells the story about estimating the cost, before building a tower, the crowd still does not get it.

So he tells them a story about a king going out to war.

No king, Jesus says, goes to war without first calculating if he has a chance to win.

But Jesus looks out at the crowd, and he's still getting blank looks.

So finally Jesus says,

"Do you think following me and being my disciple is easy?"

"Whoever does not give up everything you have...all that you possess cannot be my disciple."

Scholars point out that "hate" in this passage is not what we think of when we hear the word hate. It's not an emotion-filled word, like when a person screams "I hate you!"

This word "hate" in their culture is a Jewish hyperbole or exaggeration...for expressing detachment, turning away from.

So if Jesus doesn't mean "hate," in the way we usually think of it, does that make it any easier to hear?

Think back to the crowds following Jesus.  
 Many of them were there on a whim.  
 They didn't have Netflix back then.  
 They didn't have the Irvine Spectrum.  
 So Jesus was kind of like a new box office hit.  
 People wanted a little entertainment.

So they are all pushing and jostling to get close enough to see him  
 And he stops, and turns around  
 and says, "Count the cost. If you follow me, your family might reject you"  
 ...which was very possible in that culture. Even today, in that part of the world you are likely to be cast out of your family if you become a Christian.

In Luke chapter 9, we hear that Jesus is on a mission.  
 He has set his face toward Jerusalem.  
 And the cost of Jesus' mission, is the cross.  
 And, as he journeys on down the road to Jerusalem,  
 the crowds gradually become smaller, the admirers fall away,  
 until that dark Thursday night when Caesar's soldiers come and all Jesus' disciples forsake him and flee.

The story is told about a person who was visiting a large church, a very large, newly constructed church. And as the Sr. pastor was showing off this great building to the visitor he pointed proudly to the elegant cross suspended over the altar, and noting that it was large and made in Europe, he bragged, "That cross cost us \$5,000!"

The visitor replied, "My goodness, there was a time when you could get one of these for free, just by being faithful to Jesus."

The Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard complained of the petty preachers of his day who preached fancy sermons and tended to draw admirers of Jesus, rather than followers."

The large crowds admire Jesus. They are fascinated by his teaching.  
 But there is a great distance between admiration and discipleship,  
 a distance bridged only by something called commitment.

In today's Gospel Jesus speaks of commitment, in a way that clarifies where our highest loyalty belongs. Remember Luther's explanation to the first commandment?  
 "We are to fear, love, and trust God above everything else."

Some parents from a state out East, had sent their daughter to Duke University  
She was the first person in her family to receive a college education.

And they were so proud of her.

What would they have at the end of her time here? A doctor?

A professor?

A business executive? Maybe even a Wall Street investment banker?"

All would have gone well, except that she had this "experience" during her junior year.

Something got hold of her, someone to whom she wanted to give her life.

Her plans got rearranged.

Now, if her family brags about her at all, they must brag about

"our daughter the missionary who feeds the hungry in East Africa."

We listen to a story about a person like that, and sometimes we are tempted to think, "I could never do that." But Jesus calls each of us to "count the cost" each day, right where we live.

In our workplace, at school, and with our friends and families.

Have you ever felt the tension between doing something you know is right  
and something you'd rather Jesus didn't know about?

Jesus is calling us each day, to follow Him

- to follow His commandments
- to serve and love those who are hard to serve and hard to love
- to selflessly and generously share our time, and our talents, and yes, our possessions for the sake of His kingdom.

And the good news is that when we count the cost  
we will experience the joy of following Jesus.

There is nothing in the world like it.

There is no treasure in this world like the treasure and the joy of knowing Jesus.

God imbedded it right into our DNA. It is more blessed to give than to receive.

May you experience that joy today as we serve together on this Day of Service.

And may you experience that joy each and every day. Amen.