



**Sermon preached by the Most Reverend Melissa Skelton at St. Mark's Ocean Park:
September 8, 2019**

Luke 14:25-33

Now large crowds were travelling with Jesus; and he turned and said to them, “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. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. 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? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ 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? If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.”

I love getting a good deal on something. You know, Labour Day weekend sale with everything 50% off, organic bananas 69 cents a pound, a markdown on a markdown on a blouse at the Bay. Yes, I love getting a good deal because, well, it makes me feel shrewd, and, of course, it means I get to hold onto a little something extra in my bank account.

I think many of us are this way—delighting in getting something for less.

Some of us absorbed this from parents who came through times of great scarcity as younger people. Some of us absorbed this from parents who had to conserve what they had simply to make ends meet. And some of us ARE JUST THAT WAY.

Getting a good deal, finding a bargain, discovering a real steal, holding on to the resources that we have.

And then somewhere along the way you and I met this person named Jesus. We met him on account of others talking about him. We met him through the Church. We met him in and through Scripture. And we heard words like the words of our Gospel this morning coming from his mouth, words not about conserving what we have and holding onto who we are but, instead, words about spending big, if you will, paying a high cost to follow him.

And, if we are to be honest, when we hear these words, words about spending ourselves, words about paying a big cost to follow him, we can feel perplexed and even afraid. That's because you and I naturally want to hold on to what we have and to how we understand our lives.

And so what is Jesus saying to us in Luke's Gospel for today, a passage that some say are a part of the "hard sayings" of Jesus? What is Jesus saying, and what are we to do with it?

Let's look first at the context for this passage.

Our passage from Luke for today comes right after a time when Jesus is dining at the home of a leader of the Pharisees. At that dinner Jesus tells his dinner companions the Parable of the Great Banquet, a parable in which a man throws a banquet and invites a large number of people who offer various excuses for deciding not to come. As a result, the man becomes upset and invites the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame to the banquet, all of whom show up presumably because they have never been invited to banquets of this kind before.

In our passage for today, we go from this story told to a small group of people to Jesus addressing a crowd, a large number of people, about the decisions they have to make in if they are to be capable of following him. And, as we find out, intentionally following Jesus will be much harder than deciding to find the time to come to a banquet.

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

In ancient Mediterranean times, the word "hate" did not mean "have animosity for" as we would use it. Rather it meant to count as second. In other words, "Whoever comes to me and does not count as second father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and, yes, even life itself, cannot be my disciple."

To explain--In ancient Mediterranean times, family was identity. Who one's father or husband was, was everything. And please recall that the family system of the times was not particularly humane or kind when it came to women or children. And so what Jesus is saying here is that to become his disciple, a person will have to give up this system as the thing that defines them, will have to give up this most important piece of their identity, in order to follow him, in order to take on a new identity with different values and a different purpose.

And then Jesus continues on with other examples of what it will cost to follow him. He gives two brief examples about considering the high cost of something before committing to it. He mentions the builder of a tower who must consider the real cost of the building before undertaking the

project. Then, secondly he talks about the king going to war who must consider the real and large number of soldiers it will take to win the war.

All of these sayings and stories lead to one point—being a disciple of Jesus is not about simply staying where we are, holding back, trying to save what we have in order to conserve it or spend it later. Rather, being a disciple of Jesus is about a willingness to let go of who we have been, a willingness to assume high costs, a willingness to become a big spender of our energy and, yes, even our money, now. Being a disciple of Jesus means showing up, even though it may be costly and uncomfortable for us to do so, becoming available to those in need of liberation, ready to go on behalf of those thirsting after justice and right there for those in need of companionship and kinship.

And to return to my opening about loving a good bargain or delighting in getting something for less, being a disciple of Jesus means spending big without regard for what we will get for it. The reason that this, of course, is that this is what God is all about in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. God spends big without regard for what God will get out of it. God blows the emotional bank account for us when we were in need of liberation, when we were thirsting after justice, when we were hungry for companionship and kinship.

I saw this kind of big spending in action on a small scale during my hospital stay in June. I'm thinking particularly of an incident that happened in the intake hall for internal medicine that was close to the ER at Vancouver General Hospital.

Everyone sitting there waiting was, of course, dealing with their own illness. And what I noticed was that tendency in that circumstance was to go inside oneself either to conserve energy or because the whole hospital things is overwhelming.

I had been sitting there hooked up to an IV for about 30 minutes when down the hall comes a scary looking, thoroughly tattooed and pierced young man pushing an IV pole with his hospital gown all askew. He was also cradling a red, puffy hand which was the end of an arm full of track marks. Oh, and did I mention that he was whimpering?

As the time wore on, his whimpering changed to low cries. He sat on the floor, his gown more and more askew and made a call on his cell phone. All of us could not help but overhear his call and we discovered that he was to have surgery the next day and there was a very real likelihood that he would lose his hand. We then heard as he began to say goodbye to his friend on the phone because, must to his distress, his cell phone was losing its charge. As he hung up one of the nurses came out, tried to reassure him that it he would see the doctor in about 15 minutes, chided him a bit about keeping his arm still, and helped him get back fully into his hospital gown and into the chair.

A few chairs down from me sat a mother and a girl of about 10 years of age overhearing everything. The young girl talked quietly from time to time to her mother, obviously concerned. Her mother was trying to soothe her. After numerous exchanges, she spoke to her mother in a more urgent voice. After what sounded like more attempts to soothe her daughter. Her mother finally agreed to something that her daughter wanted. She reached into her large purse and took out something like this—a cell phone charger.

The young girl was delighted. She took the charger in her hands, got up out of her chair and went over to the scary looking, tattooed, pierced, young miserable man and offered it to him. It startled him but in a moment he brightened up, thanked her and set to work plugging his phone into it. About 15 minutes later, he was called into the doctor's office. He got up, adjusted his hospital gown and dragging his IV pole over to where the mother and young girl were sitting, held out the charger to them and said, "Thank you so much for letting me use this. I really mean it--Thank you."

Who knows what went on between the young girl and her mother and who knows what went on in that mother's mind as she tried to answer her daughter's quiet questions and as she tried to decide whether it was appropriate to let her daughter interact with the tattooed man? But I would submit that all the issues that Jesus speaks of to the crowd were in that small act of kindness. It would have been easy for the mother to have told her daughter "no," adopting an approach of protection for herself and for her daughter, of a kind of family protection quo. It would have been easy for the mother and the daughter to be completely absorbed in their own health situation and unwilling to spend the effort to reach out to another.

But these things, of course, did not happen. A young person took the initiative and showed us all what spending effort with no real regard for what we get out of it looks like. A young person showed us all a little picture of discipleship in the internal medicine waiting hall at Vancouver General Hospital.

Where are you called to expend yourself or your resources without regard for what you get in return? In what situations, large and small, might you be the one in that crowd surrounding Jesus who decides the time is now for you to put yourself out there as a way to turn toward members of God's own family who, for instance are struggling at the check-out counter in the grocery store, or who are suffering on a Reserve, or who are being bullied by others who are more privileged and powerful, or who are sitting on the floor of a hospital waiting area, tattooed, pierced and whimpering?

Where are you called to spend yourself and experience the generosity that is God's?

Wherever it is, don't be afraid. Expend yourself and spend yourself now.