

Date: September 7, 2025 (Pentecost 13)

1. Texts: Jeremiah 18:1-11; Ps. 139; Philemon 1-21; Luke 14:25-33.
2. Subject: discipleship.
3. Topic: the cost of genuine discipleship.
4. Aim: educate, encourage, empower.
5. Proposition: "The genuine disciple pays a cost to follow Jesus."

THE COST OF GENUINE DISCIPLESHIP

Over the past few Sundays, we've read a lot about the true cost of following Jesus. We've learned about setting God as first in our priority list of relationships. In today's reading from Luke, that list of priorities is reinforced with a strong connection to the cost of discipleship.

Throughout the past few decades, many modern preachers have emphasized the benefits of following Jesus in the hopes of securing more conversions. There was a somewhat strong movement in the Church in the United States called the "Prosperity Gospel", which claimed that God would bless the genuine believer with material wealth. Others pointed out the physical and spiritual health benefits of a solid relationship with Jesus. The "abundant life" of Jesus (John 10:10) was frequently interpreted in material ways in addition to emphasizing the joy and love of the Lord. The benefits of faithful living were highlighted in the hopes of securing more disciples for Jesus.

The Gospel of Luke makes it clear that there is a cost to following Jesus. There are benefits, surely. There is salvation. There is grace. There is forgiveness of sin. But such benefits come as a result of having paid the cost.

O God, would that such a sermon would not have to be preached! Would that we could pick and choose which Scripture we would neglect!

Here's the truth: the genuine disciple of Jesus puts God first in his or her priorities. God comes before parents, spouse, children and job. The cost of following Jesus is the reduction of all other relationships to second, third or fourth place in our lives. The disciple is to love God more than others and to love others less than he or she loves God. After all, loving God is primary commandment and loving others is the secondary one.

The men listening to this sermon will find it hard to think of job as less important than God and less important than other relationships. The women listening to this sermon will find it hard to think of children as less important. Family ranks in second place to God and community ranks another step further down.

That's is a central truth in the New Testament. If you are to be a disciple of Jesus, you must accept this. But our real challenge for today is to apply this truth to our daily lives.

One impact of this is the rearranging of our daily schedules. Just as the married couple has to spend effort on their relationship, so the disciple has to spend time with God. How you do that is up to you. It could be study, reading, singing, prayer, meditation or movement. It could be painting, photography or dance. Whatever the discipline is, make sure it is connected to your relationship with God. Make time to be in meaningful communication with God.

And make sure that it is communication *with* God. That is, the disciple not only speaks *to* God, but listens to hear *from* God. Communication is always a two-way street. Disciples share their lives with God, just as God shares his life with disciples.

Disciples also make similar adjustments in their activities and motives. That is, we actually apply what we have heard from God in the choices we make each day. Having heard from the chief love of our lives, we then use his conversations to plan what we are doing.

This realignment of priorities and life is not easy. There is a complicating factor involved.

Most of society sees Church attendance as an optional activity, akin to a book club or a sports team. You could go if you want, but attendance at Church is equal to other volunteer activities. That's what most people think.

That's not the idea in the New Testament. In the New Testament, Church is all about the whole family of God meeting with God to collectively work on their faith relationship with God. The community of the faithful gathers in worship to be drawn closer to God as a whole. Worship is a primary means of God's communication with us. Worshipping God collectively is an essential part of setting God as our first priority, at least according to the Bible.

It's at this point that we frequently begin to feel the possibilities of conflict with others. We begin to sense the cost of discipleship.

You see, men are raised to provide for their families and often will not tolerate any competition to their careers. Women are raised to prioritize their children, even before their spouses. Grown children are expected to love their parents above other adults in their lives. The realignment of life's priorities is not easy, and the involvement of the Church can be a common irritant.

Back in St. Paul's day, such realignment was costly. It could result in prison or death. It certainly broke up familial relationships. It cost Philemon (= "fi-leh-mon") a valuable slave. It likely cost St. Paul his own arranged marriage. It cost St. Stephen his life.

Nowadays, the realignment of our priorities along God's plan can create conflict and even estrange families. It is unlikely that we will face death because of our faith, but we certainly could face isolation from family and community.

There is a cost to following Jesus. Each of us will have to decide if we are willing to pay that cost and pay it on a daily basis. The cost of discipleship is high, for it does cost us our lives.

In return for that cost, we receive the abundant life of Christ, a life guided by God's purposes and strength. We receive grace upon grace. We discover our God-created identity and truth. We are empowered to serve the Creator in word and deed, so that others may come to the realization of faith. Discipleship is costly. Each one of us will have to decide if discipleship is worth its cost. AMEN.