**Sermon on Luke 14:25-33**

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There’s no getting around it: today’s gospel is brutal.

Jesus turns to the crowds who are following him 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.” And “None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.”

This is not obviously Good News. Is he trying to chase people away?

Maybe, in a sense, he is. At this point in the story, Jesus and his friends are headed to Jerusalem one last time. He knows what’s going to happen; maybe not the details, but he’s got a strong sense. And it’s going to be hard, hard, hard. So maybe he wants to make sure that the people following him are not under any illusions. He doesn’t want them following because they’re swept up in the excitement, or because they imagine it will be easy, or because they think it won’t really ask anything of them. He speaks with sharpness because he is stripping away illusions.

What are our illusions? The illusion that we can always keep everyone happy? The illusion that possessions can keep us safe? The illusion that discipleship can be added on to an otherwise comfortable life without disrupting anything? The illusion that we can calculate the cost and stay in control?

I am a bit confused by the two illustrations that Jesus gives—calculating in advance the cost of building and estimating the strength of an army before engaging in battle. He seems to be saying, yes, calculate the cost before making a major decision or you’ll end up on the losing side, looking ridiculous. And yet his teachings almost always look like foolishness to the wider world. If someone takes your coat, give him your other one. The meek will inherit the earth. If you lose your life you will gain it. All I can think is that he is being ironic, because even when we sit down and think, we can’t really know the outcome.

Our illusions—that we can control outcomes, that we can distract ourselves with getting things then giving them away—those illusions are heavy. They weigh us down. And Jesus doesn’t want his disciples to live in illusions—he wants them to live in truth.

This is the first Sunday of the Season of Creation and the connection isn’t too hard to see: We are living in a time when, increasingly, illusions are being stripped away. The illusion that we can live on a finite planet with infinite consumption. The illusion that we can keep burning, extracting, consuming, and nothing will change.

We know better. We are already counting the cost — in heat waves and fires, in floods and storms, in species lost, in young people fearful for their future. In the smoke we’ve been breathing in the last few days.

There is a strong element of “burn it all down” in this passage. The Jewish Annotated New Testament notes that the rabbis did not teach voluntary poverty as that would impose a hardship on the family. Rather, they strongly supported almsgiving, charity. Myself, I’d like to side with the rabbis. Let’s make everyone’s life more bearable by sharing what we have. The thing is, we are living in a world that is literally burning down. Things are urgent.

In this congregation, I know that we are already trying to live differently. We reduce, reuse, recycle. We make choices about what we eat, how we get around, how we spend our money. We already feel the weight of climate grief, and sometimes even guilt. So I want to be clear: Jesus is not piling on one more burden. This gospel is not another list of things to do. It is, instead, an invitation to let go.

Because here is the paradox: when Jesus tells us to renounce possessions, he is not trying to deprive us. He is inviting us into freedom. To be free from the endless temptation to acquire, to fill our lives with stuff. To be free from the distraction of just one more thing, one small upgrade, that this time will fill the void inside.

When he warns that discipleship may put us at odds with family, he is not trying to destroy relationships. He is telling the truth: that sometimes faithfulness means making choices that others don’t understand. And when that happens, he is saying: *you belong to a wider family now. A household of God that includes people who are comfortable, people on the margins, and even the earth itself.*

When he speaks of carrying the cross, he is not glorifying suffering. He is inviting us into self-giving love. He is naming the reality that love is costly, that it means solidarity with vulnerable people who are not like us and it means accepting our own vulnerability. But even Jesus didn’t carry the cross alone. We can carry it together and Christ carries it with us. Always.

So, what if we heard this gospel not as another burden, but as an urgent invitation to set something down?

To set down the illusion that we are in control of the planet’s future. To set down the illusion that our possessions will keep us safe. To set down the illusion that we have to do everything ourselves. And in setting those things down, to discover that we belong — to God, to each other, and to the whole community of creation.

The Season of Creation begins with honesty: there is a cost to discipleship, to following Jesus. There is a cost to living truthfully on this earth. But it is not a cost meant to crush us. It is the cost of letting go of illusions that were weighing us down all along.

And on the other side of letting go is life: life abundant, life shared, life renewed in God’s household of creation.

So hear again the sharpness of Jesus’ words. They are not meant to harm. They are meant to set us free.

Free to live lightly. Free to live truthfully. Free to live as part of God’s beloved creation.