

September 4, 2016
Luke 14:25-35

Proper 18C
Cost of Discipleship

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a classic Lutheran Theological Work, *The Cost of Discipleship*. Bonhoeffer was ultimately martyred in Germany under the Nazi regime. I am not Bonhoeffer historian, but I do know that he arrived in the United States for a short time, but had a real calling to be with his people in Germany, to share God's Word with them. He ultimately found himself in Concentration camps and then killed. He gave up everything to be Christ's Disciple.

In today's Gospel lesson, we again hear this Gospel Call for Discipleship. We also hear what the cost of discipleship is actually. The cost is steep. We hear once again from the lips of Jesus that being one of Jesus' disciples is not an easy task. This Cost of Discipleship seems harsh.

Jesus calls us to hate family, and yes, our own individual lives, oh and our possessions. That's a tough Calling. It shows us that there is quite a tension in our lives. Jesus has already taught us to Love each other as we love ourselves. And now He uses the term Hate. What is going on? The words of Jesus grab us and I'm sure they grabbed his original hearers.

Oftentimes when we hear Jesus saying things like he does today, we are tempted to explain away the tension. Sometimes, pastors want to calm the tones down, by looking at the Greek and using literary devices, but that's not my plan this morning.

I'm not going to run away from the tension this morning...and let me tell you, as some of you know, I don't like tension. Rather, I want to challenge you to allow the tension do what it's supposed to do, especially when it comes to the tension of our lives as disciples. Tension is supposed to bring our daily lives into alignment with our faith life. What we believe and how we actually live can get out of alignment. Living in the tension of this text brings us the much needed alignment. Living in the tension can bring us out of our apathetic life.

We discover that Living Christ's call to discipleship means giving up everything for Him. And I mean EVERYTHING.

In our text, the crowds are much like the crowds that flock to hear Jesus today. Many people want to hear Jesus teach, they want to hear all the good things he has to say, but living fully committed lives to him, not a chance. I really don't have time for that...and really it's not much the time, it's that I don't care that much, people say. People are called to be disciples all the time, but yet that apathetic mood gets in the way. The crowds were apathetic towards Jesus, they were sitting in the stands so to speak. Discipleship is not a spectator sport. Discipleship is not a life of apathy. Discipleship is living and active.

The cost of discipleship is shocking to our ears. Let's hear how shocking it is: "If anyone comes after me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, cannot be my disciple." We might be questioning Jesus' vocabulary of hate here, but that's what it is in the Greek. Jesus clarifies this a few chapters later: "No one can serve two master, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." You see, you cannot mix allegiances, attention, or affection. When it comes right down to it, you will choose one over the other. The choice here is not to hate your friends and family. Rather, it is, a call to put your faith first, to put Jesus first in your life above everything else. It's a call to be living and active in your faith, to put the apathy to bed.

Jesus continues to make clear the cost of discipleship in our text. It's not just to surrender family to Jesus...but Jesus calls us to surrender everything! "If anyone...does not hate...even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."

As with our relationships, is Jesus literally telling us to give away everything and to hate life. He's calling us to a radical change of lifestyle, and view all of life as a gift from God that is to be used for His purpose in his Kingdom. It's living a steward's life. If I'm the owner, the well-being of property and my relationships is dependent on my work. This means my focus is on stuff...and not on the things of God. By allowing the ownership to be taken care of by the true owner, God Himself, I manage and care for the good gifts given to me, but I also know that their safety and well-being is in his hands. After all, "He's Got the Whole World In His Hands."

By having God radically realign our lives (that is done in baptism and daily living baptism) it realigns our priorities with God's priorities: this means our focus is on people over stuff...including in the church...people over building, people over money, people over insurance, eternal over temporal. This is a huge problem I see in the church, I even see it here, we focus on money, buildings and insurance and forget about the people in our communities. Christ is here to radically change our perspective and it can be painful as we are realigned in our Baptismal life.

Radical change in our lives comes when Christ calls us! It puts an end to apathy, it drives us to living lives fully devoted to Christ. It's the gift of faith that propels us to living actively. It's the gospel not the law that encourages and ramps us for active life in service to Christ and our neighbor.

Yes, the cost of discipleship is shocking to one's ear, the activity of discipleship would have been tarrying to the hearers in the crowds. Jesus again calls us to carry our own cross. He says, "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple."

If you were living in the early decades of the first century your ears heard this and you were rattled. You see, in the time of Christ, Crucifixion was a common form of punishment for the rebels who sought to overthrow Rome. It was not uncommon for the rebels to refer to the

burden of their cause as a cross, for they knew that if they did not die in battle, they would likely die by crucifixion. They would be forced to carry their cross.

Imagine for a moment what that challenge must have sounded like to the crowd. Jesus was not calling them to a metaphor (as we read it); people were literally being crucified along the roads between their towns for being insurrectionists. A call to carry the cross was a call to live life as if judgment had already passed and now each step they took was a step that brought them nearer to the place of execution. This was the worst possible way to die known at the time, and now this kind, loving Rabbi is telling them that to follow him is to choose such a death? While the challenge is uncomfortable for you and me to hear, it must have been simply terrifying for the crowd.

We have to admit, there's a tension, with radical call to follow Jesus. So what do we do with it. Living in the tension begins with understanding the true source of the tension. Jesus' call is not the source of the tension; our sin is...yours and mine. You see, when God created man, he created us to walk with God without distraction or compromise. It is sin that pits two loves against each other. It is our weakness that causes us to love one and hate another. Rather than blaming Jesus for these high standards that are uncomfortable at best, blame our sinful broken lives that have made our separation from God seem normal.

We also rejoice. Yes, the tension we feel in this challenge is good. We rejoice that our life in Christ rests upon His perfect love, undivided attention, and unwavering sacrifice. Jesus did what we could not do. He carried His cross perfectly. He died on His cross, defeated sin, and conquered the grave. This victory and new life is a gift to us. In Baptism, our old nature was drowned, and have been given new life in the Spirit. In this new life, this baptismal life, we are given the will and the strength to follow Jesus with undivided attention and unwavering conviction of our life as a living sacrifice to God.

There's a tension that we feel and experience and it's a wonderful reminder that we do have new life in Christ. Christ is the one that gives you radical change. He radically changed you at your baptism to go from a poor miserable sinner to a forgiven saint. He radically changes you every time you come to the Lord's Table. At the Table, when you receive His Supper, you receive the forgiveness of sins. When your pastor speaks the words of forgiveness to you, again you go from poor miserable sinner to forgiven saint. When you hear the Word of God read and preached to you, you are being radically changed by Jesus.

As you are being radically changed here today, to answer His call of discipleship once again! How close are you following Jesus? Are stepping on his heels or are you running out of gas? Are you just waving to Jesus and cheering Him on. You see, being given the gospel, we have a great gift to give, not to sit on for ourselves...then the salt might lose its saltiness. The gift that we give isn't just done by saying Jesus is Lord. It's be living lives active in faith. It's about getting out of the stands and into the game. It's about seeing the needs of our neighbor and taking care of them – and not just the physical needs of our neighbor, but also his spiritual needs.

As Jesus turned to the crowds in our text, he now turns to you and me, not to lay a burden on you, but to invite us to set free the lives given to us in Baptism by focusing our life on following Jesus without fear of consequence or challenge.

Jesus is going on ahead of us...so hold on tight, hold fast to him.

In Jesus name. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.