

What Am I Holding Back?
Luke 14:25-33 2022

Luke 14:25-33 (New Revised Standard Version)

Now large crowds were traveling with him; and he turned and said to them, ²⁶ “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. ²⁷ Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸ 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? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, ³⁰ saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ ³¹ 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? ³² If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. ³³ So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

Back when I used to interview applicants to work in our business,
I always tried to make my expectations very clear
and wanted to be up front with what the job required.

Our stores were open on weekdays plus half-a-day on Saturdays,
and everyone had to work at least every other Saturday.
If an applicant wasn't willing to work those hours,
then I couldn't use them and I wouldn't hire them.

In the Luke passage, Jesus had fed a huge crowd of well over 5000,
had done miraculous healings, taught with wonderful parables,
it has been very entertaining to watch and enjoy the show
as Jesus exposed the hypocrisy of the scribes & Pharisees,
and so he'd attracted a large crowd of followers.

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem for the events of the Passion,
he was going there to die, but those in the crowd had no idea.
Jesus was popular, traveling with him was easy and comfortable,
until he starts describing the rigors & cost of discipleship.

Here, Jesus is giving them fair warning that faithful discipleship
wouldn't be all comfort and ease along the way, vs. 26.

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.

In this text, Jesus is not calling for Christians
to be hateful, nasty or cruel to our loved ones,
**but insisting that our relationship & walk with Christ,
our Christian discipleship must be our first priority.**

In Hebrew and Aramaic the word translated as “hate”
does not mean an antagonistic or emotional hostility,
but is used in a comparative sense, to love something less,
it is to have less regard or loyalty, and willing to forgo.

It means that our commitment to follow Jesus Christ has to be greater than all our other commitments, including family.

When Luke decided to include this material in his Gospel, he recognized that the message Jesus said to that crowd, also spoke to the situation within his faith community of Christians who were struggling with persecution, feeling discouraged with no relief or end in sight.

In that Middle Eastern culture, family or clan was a person's primary identification & loyalty, and to become a Christian often meant turning against family.

It was not easy to be a faithful disciple amid threat and hostility, but Jesus was saying that by grace we become a new creation, and **God's Kingdom becomes our primary loyalty and identity.**

Jesus explains what discipleship & following him really entails, and warns those in the crowd to count the cost before signing on, for true & faithful Christian discipleship is nothing less than being aware and willing to pay the cost & sacrifice.

Jesus wants them to know, just as Jesus wants **us** to know, that true and faithful discipleship comes at a high price, and that it won't always be easy to follow where Jesus leads.

That means family, our present circumstances **& even past mistakes** will no longer define who we are or who we are becoming **because God's grace has power to transform beyond all that.** Indeed some of God's best work happens when it seems most hopeless.

In Florence, Italy, toward the end of the 15th century, a sculptor began work on a large & magnificent piece of marble, but messed it up badly and damaged the marble beyond repair.

For several decades other artists were brought in, but all of them rejected the ruined block as hopelessly destroyed and worthless.

In 1502, Michelangelo began work on that same slab of marble, and 18 months later completed his statue of David, **one of the finest masterpieces anyone ever sculpted...
... from that hopelessly spoiled block of marble.**

A most significant aspect and purpose of Christian discipleship is God's **gracious work of transforming**, of sculpting human lives, from broken, damaged and seemingly useless & worthless lives, from discarded leftovers made **into beautiful and amazing...**

... which requires us to set aside our all & fully trust God's grace, by **leaning into that power** to cleanse, heal & change our lives.

In the text, the phrase, "cannot be my disciple" is repeated 3 times. In the Greek, that phrase

includes the word from which we get the word dynamite & dynamo.

It means that we won't **have the power** to become disciples
or **have the strength** to sustain faithful discipleship,
against the obstacles and distractions of this world,
if we place anything, even our lives before Christ.

Jesus is using language that's difficult & harshly demanding. vs. 27
Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

To carry our cross
doesn't mean just bearing with our life's troubles or problems,
but refers to the things that we willingly do and endure
as a consequence of our commitment to Jesus Christ.

It is voluntarily submitting to God in every life circumstance,
and under the absolute lordship of Jesus Christ,
freely giving our all, and the whole of our being,
allowing for God's grace to transform our lives.

Then Jesus continues and concludes, vs. 33
So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

To give up our possessions, the Greek word is "to release control".
It doesn't mean that we must all take a vow of destitute poverty,
but truly **to serve God unrestrained and to love God**
even more than any of our things, or anything else.

It means that we allow nothing to hinder or stand in the way
of our ever-closer walk & deepening relationship with God...

... which infers that we cannot **truly be disciples of Jesus Christ**
if there aren't any significant changes in how we live our lives.

If grace isn't making any difference, then we're not living as disciples,
and we are missing out on the full blessings that God intends to give.

Now all that doesn't mean we're trying to buy or earn or deserve
God's favor, grace or our salvation by performing good works,
but it's about learning to trust & surrender **our all** to God.

Discipleship is the process of God's gracious love transforming us
so that more and more we perceive life through the eyes of Christ:

- * where there is need, we try to help and make it better
- * where there is despair, we speak of hope & possibilities
- * where there is hurt, we try to heal the brokenness
- * where there is anger, we move toward reconciliation
- * where and when we are feeling stressed and weary
it means to pause, and perhaps **not** speak or act harshly.

That is the true purpose and process of Christian discipleship ---
it's our ongoing journey of faithful service and transformation.
For yes, **God's grace is free, but faithful discipleship is costly,**

and trying to be faithful makes our lives a lot more complicated.

So why is life difficult & hard, a struggle more than comfort & ease?

**It's because God still has some work yet to do in us
before we are ready and able and prepared
to live forever in the glorious kingdom of God.**

And so surely **our Christian purpose to accomplish in this life,**
is to become **more malleable** to the work of God's Spirit and will,
by giving ourselves as unreserved and as entirely as we can
to our life-long journey of learning to know God better,
rather than clinging to the stuff of this world.

My own experience is that taking Jesus Christ seriously is hard,
in fact, the situations where I have been **most faithful** have also
often been **among the most difficult and most costly of my life.**

For that reason, Christ warns his followers to calculate the cost,
because the faithful discipleship he desires, comes at a price,
and Jesus wants us to trust and follow him, anyway. vs. 28, 31

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? 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?

Jesus is not willing to be just another **one thing among the many,**
but requires a full commitment and that he must be first,
for only then will everything else find its way into place.

The point is, if we take that grace and the call of God seriously,
it will grow into making a difference in every part of our lives.

Grace will seep and spread into every crevice and opening
and God will accomplish far more and better
then we could ever possibly do for ourselves...

**... which means there are consequences to living an authentic faith,
and living into a life of discipleship that grace makes possible-
and when all of life is surrendered to God's will and purpose,
that creates space enough for grace & blessings to flourish.**

**So today as we come to the Lord's Table, we must remember that
it is a place of grace and welcome, of presence and nurture,
where we can be entirely open and honest with the Lord,
knowing with certainty that we'll still always be loved.**

Therefore, as we read in 1 Peter 5:6-7

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time.
Cast all your anxiety on him, **because he cares for you.**

I pray that we will each inquire and listen for God's Spirit,

to reveal whatever is holding us back and interfering
or keeping us from giving our all and best to God,
so that as Mother Theresa described,
we would become **a pencil in the hand of God that
he can use to write a love-letter to the world.**