

## **“Disciples Take Faith Seriously” – Luke 14:25-33 – September 8, 2019**

As September settles in, leaves are beginning to show a hint of color, pumpkin spice everything is showing up on store shelves, and parents and grandparents are posting photos of their kids heading back to school. Young people are learning to adjust to new teachers and new classes, and many freshmen college students are experiencing being away from home for the first time. I’m reminded of own first year at Morehead State University in the hills of eastern Kentucky, learning to fit in, making new friends, and doing whatever it took to further my skills in music. A staple on most college campuses is Greek life. I couldn’t quite see myself in a Greek social sorority. But Sigma Alpha Iota was different. It was a professional and philanthropic organization for woman music majors.

But if you’ve ever been part of the Greek system, you know you just can’t slap the letters on sweatshirt and start wearing them around campus. There is a time of discovery, where you learn about the organization, and they learn about you. This is known as the pledging period. The active members teach you what it means to be a part of the whole. There is mystery surrounding the initiation process. The pledge period can be demanding, but you go through it to prove your commitment to the organization. Once you’ve had a chance to learn what the group is all about and you know up front what is expected of you as a member, you make your final oath of loyalty to the group and you become initiated. It’s important to know what it means to be a member before joining a group.

In a way, this is what Jesus is talking about here in Luke’s gospel, while he and his disciples are traveling to Jerusalem. Along the way, groups of people come alongside and want to join up with them. Jesus is a bit of a celebrity by now, and people wanted to be part of the in-crowd.

But Jesus knows what’s on the horizon in Jerusalem. He knows that it will take much more than simple enthusiasm for these crowds to truly follow him. To be his disciple requires commitment and devotion to Jesus and to his mission. Jesus never attempted to lure people to him with flashy gimmicks or speeches. He was upfront with people. With him, there was no need to read between the lines. The cost of one’s commitment to him was always spelled out in advance.

To follow him requires ultimate commitment. His way is the standard by which measure everything in our lives. Our obligation to him supersedes even our human relationships. And that might require to say no to someone we love in order to say yes to Jesus. His way is difficult, because it goes against the norm. The way of Jesus is countercultural and following him is risky, exposing his followers to possible ridicule, misunderstanding, and cruelty. At the least, to follow Jesus may require us to step beyond what is comfortable and normative.

Using parables, Jesus illustrates the need for counting the cost before embarking on an endeavor. Describing a farmer building a tower, he shows that to begin a project without prior planning and not having enough supplies to get the job done would be foolish. In the same way, it would be unwise for a king to go off to war when he knows the enemy outnumbers his soldiers two to one. Embarking on a venture that is doomed from the start is pure folly.

Jesus uses these parables to warn people that following him is costly, and a person needs to think about that before running after him. Shallow faith and commitment will evaporate at the first hint of difficulty.

And then Jesus tells them, to follow him, they will need to give up everything. Implicit in this is the willingness to forego that which gives shape and substance to one's life. It means the need to renounce the hold that these things, these material substances, have over our lives. We often find ourselves possessed by our possessions.

So tied up are we in the security that other people and things give to us, we find it difficult, if not impossible, to give that up. Our identity is wrapped up in people and in things, but according to Jesus, a disciple finds his or her identity in Jesus alone. This is especially hard for us to hear when materialism is such an integral part of our society. But the fact remains; our reliance on people and things is equivalent to idolatry. Without much effort, I am sure each one of us could begin listing the people and things that get in the way of following Christ

When Jesus spoke to these people, he wasn't interested in enthusiastic crowds hopping aboard the bandwagon to Jerusalem. He was looking for people who after thoughtfully considering the full cost of commitment, were willing to follow him and put him first in their lives. He was looking for people who were willing to be transformed, those who were willing to give up one way of life for another.

Jesus was not and is not expecting a complete guarantee of devotion up front. If this were the case, no one would qualify for discipleship. Each of us fails continually in our path of following Christ. That's the truly wonderful thing about grace! We all fail in our commitment to Jesus. Yet he continues to call us. And we continue to respond. It is when we stop responding to his call that we truly fail to honor our commitment to him.

The cost of discipleship is unique for each person. No two paths are completely identical. Our destination is the same, but our journeys are exclusively our own. What is common to all of us is the call to put Jesus Christ first in our lives. So let us each examine where we are in relation to that commitment. For some of us it may mean a redirection of how we spend our time or energy or resources. For others it might indicate a need to restructure our

interpersonal relationships. For still others it could point to a needed change in vocation or interests. Perhaps it is a combination of some or all of these. Only God can tell each of us where the need for deeper commitment is in our own lives.

Once we begin to take a hard look at how we are living our lives, it will probably be evident to us what areas need a little tweaking. You may even feel God pushing you in a particular direction. Perhaps something is holding you back. Fear of the unknown can be a big hindrance. But the amazing thing is, after we commit to making a change in our lives, the transformation that occurs is often better than we could have ever possibly imagined.

Each step we take toward our commitment to following Christ will impact us in a different way. Some things will be small, causing subtle changes in who we are. Other things will be major, life-transforming events. It doesn't matter how big or small the change is. What does matter is that we continually pursue our commitment to follow Jesus Christ. The cost may be high, but in the long run, the rewards are out of this world.