

The Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 12, 2010
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Luke 14:25-33

Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own life--he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' "Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple. (NIV)

Before we commit to something, isn't it wise to first count the cost? What I mean is it would be good to know just what we are getting ourselves into and how much time and money and effort something requires. If you are sitting down with an army recruiter it would be good to count the cost - to know exactly what you are signing up to do. If you want your children to play an instrument or join a team it would be good to count the cost. You will want to know how much the instrument or team equipment is - how many days it will take up each week - how many concerts or games the commitment involves. With NFL football on many minds today, think about the many veterans who for another year had to count the cost - is it worth putting your body and mind through the rigors of another long season? Then there are longer term commitments where it is good to count the cost. When you get married - you want to know what you are getting into so you better know the person well as you approach the altar to make promises of a life-long commitment to one another.

Dear friends, we are gathered as a people who want to follow Jesus. We are in a committed relationship with God because of Jesus. He is our life and our Savior. As Jesus leads and we follow, Jesus asks us to consider something today. Jesus wants us to examine just what it means to be one of His disciples. He wants us to count the cost. Jesus wants us to know exactly what it means to live for Him. As we turn to God's Holy Word let us hear our Lord speak to us saying: **Count the Cost of Committing to Christ.**

Jesus often had great crowds of people following Him, and not always for the right reasons. The people wanted to see miracles. They wanted food and healing. They wanted to see what earthly blessings Jesus could give them next, and how this Christ could make life easier for them. So Jesus speaks some words that are meant to shock. He teaches a lesson that for many is a bit hard to swallow. *"Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own*

life--he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."

These are pretty tough words, aren't they? But do you understand the point? Jesus is not looking for half-hearted commitments here. He wants people all in. Jesus is to come first in our lives. We are not just to dislike but we are to hate anything that tries to break our relationship with Jesus - even if it is our own mother or child or spouse - even if it is our own life. We are to hate all that interferes with following Jesus. Jesus also wants His disciples to know what they are in for when they follow Him. Things will not always be easy. There will be crosses to bear. A cross is any suffering or trouble that comes our way because we are Jesus' disciple. People may make fun of us. They may persecute us. Most of Jesus' closest disciples, next to Him when He spoke these words, would even be put to death because of Jesus. Following Jesus means giving up certain things. It means facing difficulties.

Now Jesus uses two illustrations to teach His disciples to count the cost. ***"Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' "Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace."***

Jesus compares the Christian life to a costly building project and a fierce war. Like completing the task of building a tower, Jesus wants us to follow Him all the way and not give up half way there. How sad and foolish that would be - like a half built tower. Jesus wants us to see our faith in Him through to the end. He wants us to fight and to finish the race. But this will not be easy because our sinful flesh will not want us to keep building. The devil and the sinful world will want us to end the fight. Jesus wants to open our eyes to what we are up against. In fact, Jesus says: ***"in the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple."*** Are you counting the cost of committing to Christ? Jesus says it costs everything to follow Him. There are no ties that are to come between us! There are no things that are more important! Jesus wants our all. Jesus wants disciples that are totally committed.

So how are we doing? These words sting a bit, don't they? How many times don't you and I give Jesus far less than a 100% commitment? How many times haven't we put Jesus and His Word on the back burner and focused more on or instead followed family or friends or jobs or hobbies or anything and everything else? How often have we sinned by giving up when the going gets tough? Have we ever tried to avoid carrying our crosses by hiding our faith and the fact we are one of Jesus' disciples? If I need to look at myself and my commitment, if being Jesus' disciple depends totally on me, if it is up to my strength to build the tower or fight the war, the tower would collapse and the war would be lost before it even started. When I count the cost what I find is that I am sinful and weak. The cost of committing to Christ is far too much for me on my own.

That's why we, like the disciples here, need to rely on and simply follow Jesus to where He was going. Jesus was on His way as He speaks these shocking words. With the Passover pilgrims Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem - for Jesus it would be for the

last time. Jesus was committed to finish what He came to do. He was committed to you and me. That meant the cross of all crosses to bear. Jesus would willingly sacrifice His perfectly committed life - even for half-hearted disciples. He would willingly suffer for sin - even for our sinful lack of commitment and all our other sins. Jesus would shed His own blood and lay down His own life - to save and rescue ours. Jesus gave up all that He had - so we can enjoy all God has to offer. Jesus' empty tomb reveals the first-fruits of God's eternal blessings.

When we follow Jesus to the cross and to the empty tomb - we see just how much Christ is worth following. We see why it is worth giving up everything we have to be His disciples. The Gospel gives us the only life worth living. As Paul puts it so wonderfully: ***“For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.”*** Jesus' love for us makes it easy to be committed to Him. Now my life is easy to give up because what is important to me is to live for the one who saved me from hell. It is no longer about my glory, but doing it all to the glory of God.

These words before us today remind me of a couple other parables Jesus taught. Remember when Jesus taught about the treasure in the field and the merchant who found a pearl of great value. Recall how in joy they both went and sold everything they had because they had found something far greater. That is what we have in Jesus, our Savior, my friends. Jesus is worth every sacrifice. He is worth losing everything else this life has to offer for He is our greatest treasure. So count the cost of committing to Christ. One day we will truly realize there is no commitment more worth it. When you start to waver go again and again to the cross to see how committed Jesus was to you. Listen to Jesus' word and come to His supper to receive the forgiveness that flows from His own body and blood. In this Word and Sacrament we find the strength only God can give - so that the building God began in us at our baptisms might one day be finished, and the war and victory Christ already made sure of for us will be won. Commit yourselves to the Lord and He will do this! Amen.