

September 8, 2013
Pentecost 16

"Following Jesus Won't Be Easy"

LUKE 14:25-33

Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: ²⁶ "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. ²⁷ And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸ "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? ²⁹ For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, ³⁰ saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' ³¹ "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? ³² 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. ³³ In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.

I am holding in my hand something familiar to you. It is a hula hoop which we use for the kids at our Star Bible Camp. The hula hoop came out in the 1950's. It was a craze. Everyone had to have a hula hoop. There was even a song on the radio by the "Chipmunks" about wanting a hula hoop for Christmas. How we laughed when we received hula hoops for Christmas and tried them for the first time. We laughed even more when our aunts tried to wiggle their hips and make the hula hoop spin around their torsos.

Jesus was the latest craze. It says that "large crowds of people traveled with Jesus." The crowds gathered around him in large numbers. They wanted to see more miracles. They wanted to join in the "oohs and ahs" just as you do on Fourth of July when you go to see the fireworks.

Jesus has solemn words for these people who were crowding around him just to be part of the excitement. He lets them know that following him for the right reasons will not be easy. He speaks about carrying a cross of pain and suffering. He speaks of tension in families between those who love Jesus for the right reasons and those who want nothing to do with him.

Consider the challenge

Jesus speaks bluntly about the challenge of following him. "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." Jesus does not hide the difficulty of following him. It means putting him first ahead of your family members and people you love.

These words of Jesus about hating family members really bother people. Didn't Jesus tell us to love people not hate them? Doesn't the Bible tell us in 1 John that anyone who hates

his brother is a murderer? How do we understand these harsh words about coming to Jesus and hating member of our family?

The answer can be found in the way God speaks about his relationship with Jacob and Esau. In the last book of the Old Testament, the prophet Malachi, the Lord God says, "Yet, I have Jacob, but Esau I have hated." This verse is quoted in Romans 9 to show that God has every right to hand out more blessings to one person than to another as was the case with Esau and Jacob. Read about the life of Esau in Genesis and realize the Lord richly blessed Esau. But he chose Jacob over Esau to be the one from whom the line of the Savior would come. Just as God chose Jacob over Esau Jesus asks us to choose him over our family members and relatives, especially those who may want to pull us away from Jesus. Jesus uses the word "hate" to help us realize he must be first and others are second.

It has been said that it costs you nothing to become a Christian but it will cost you everything to be a Christian. How amazing it is that Jesus took the huge debt of my sin that cries out for punishment from God and paid for it completely at the cross. We speak about being saved by grace alone. There is an amazing verse in Romans 3:24 that says, "For we all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." I sin and fall short of God's glory. I have this huge debt I cannot pay. Jesus freely forgives me through the redemption he earned for me at the cross. Forgiveness and peace with God and being justified cost me nothing, but it cost Jesus everything. Even the faith to believe is also a free gift of God's grace.

What will it cost you to hold on to this free forgiveness you have in Christ? It may cost you everything if you have family members who are trying to pull you away from Christ and the blessings you have in him. As much as I love my wife and my children and other members of my family and members of this congregation, I love Jesus more. Jesus comes first and they are second. What is true for me is also true for you. If you have family members whom you love who are trying to separate you from Christ, you may have to say to them: "Stay away from me with your false teaching. I don't want anything to do with what you are telling me." Jesus always comes first even if members of our own family don't understand why we want to follow Jesus at all cost and why we trust in his payment for sin as the sole source of our salvation.

Jesus also describes this challenge of following him as bearing a cross. "And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." This large crowd of people was very familiar with Jesus' words about carrying a cross. Some of them had probably witnessed first hand the horrors of death by crucifixion. If they hadn't seen crucifixion up close they certainly heard the stories of people who were actually there. The pain and suffering were unbelievable.

People will get angry with you because you follow Jesus closely in love for all he has done for you. If you want to make people angry start telling them what they are doing wrong is a sin against God. If you want to make them even angrier tell them there is nothing they can do to save themselves. But if you really want to raise their anger level higher, tell them that Christ has done everything that is necessary to save them. The anger meter jumps up to "10" (show anger meter) because people believe in their heart of hearts that

there is something they must do to contribute to their salvation. Follow Jesus closely. Live your life out of love for all that he has done for you and you will experience pain and suffering for your convictions.

Let's be sure that we understand the difference between the sufferings of this life and the special suffering that comes with following Jesus closely. Some of you are suffering this morning with aches and pains. People you love have to have surgery or go to the doctor. These problems come to us in life because of Adam's fall into sin. There will be various levels of pain and suffering which all us must endure- some more and some less.

This past week our community saw the body of one of our soldiers return to the Santa Maria Airport. A young man died from an improvised explosive device while serving in Afghanistan. Why did this have to happen? Why are so many of our soldiers maimed and suffering from war experiences? As long as this world exists, people will suffer because of the evil that comes to them from the sinful behavior of others. Children are suffering in this community because of sinful behavior of parents who are caught up in abuses from drugs and alcohol.

To understand the difference between suffering that is common to all people and suffering that is unique to the Christian think of the life of Job. He suffered immensely when he lost his wealth and his children and his health. His greatest pain came from his own wife and his friends. His dear wife told him to curse God and die. His friends told him to diligently search for this monstrous sin he had committed in his life which they said was the cause of his pain and suffering. That was his cross that he had to bear.

In John 15 Jesus tells us that he is the Vine and we are the branches. Because you are closely connected to him, everything Jesus has done for you is personally yours. You also bear fruit out of love for him, just as branch of the vine bears bunches of grapes. Bearing fruit includes a life that is contrary to the world around you. Jesus also tells us in John 15 "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first....If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you."

Count the cost

To prepare us for what the future might bring, Jesus uses the example of building a tower and going to war. "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.'" If you decide to buy an old home and fix it up, it would be wise for you to determine how much it will cost you to do the repairs. Will the house need a new roof? Will it need to have the electrical redone, the plumbing replaced, new flooring, new cabinets, new dry wall. Half way through the project you run out of money. The home sits idle. People say, "That's the home where the people ran out of money before they could complete it. Now it just sits idle."

He also told about a king who wants to go to war against another king. First he has to determine if he 10,000 soldiers is enough to fight against another king with 20,000 soldiers. Lately we are hearing a lot about going to war. How much will it cost in lives

and money? What if the war drags on and on and on? It sure helps to know what we are getting into when we send our troops into other countries.

Jesus tells us what we are getting into when we follow him and put him first in our lives because of all he has done to rescue us and save us. He says, "In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple." As we said earlier, it cost you nothing to become a Christian, but it could cost you everything to be a Christian.

Think about the house you are building. Jesus leaves you on this earth to be involved in building up his kingdom. He lets you suffer as you pray for people to come to know his love for them, especially members of your family. He lets you share God's Word with them to bring them in the kingdom and keep them in the kingdom. He lets you be a soldier of the cross. He lets you bear about in your body the dying of the Lord Jesus. Just as they once whipped the body of Jesus, they whip those who carry the dying of the Lord Jesus on their bodies and in their lives. We close with the words of Paul written from a prison in Rome as he is about to face death for Jesus. "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge will award to me on that day- and not to me only, but also to all who have longed for his appearing." Amen.