

The Fifth Sunday in Martyrs' Tide, September 4, 2022

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The Cost of Discipleship

Luke 14:25–35

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Eph 1:2

Now great crowds accompanied [Jesus], and He turned and said to them, “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. . . . So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be My disciple.” (vv 25–27, 33)

Do you remember what led to John the Baptist's death?
He told Herod not to sleep with Herodias, his brother's wife.
Saying that cost John his freedom.
Later it cost him his head.
A steep price to pay for speaking the truth about marriage!

Now imagine if John had had a wife or children,
or if his parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth, were still alive.
What might they have said?
And his disciples—what might they have thought about all this?

Did any of them think John was crazy or stupid?
Did they agree with him but wish he'd tone it down?
Did they feel like he took things a little too far? A bit extreme, perhaps?
And did any of them say,
“What about us, John?
You'd really give up this life—your life with us—
to rebuke Herod for committing adultery,
and then to rot in prison and lose your head?
Do you really hate us that much? Why don't you love us?”

To which John would've replied:
“Let me tell you what love has to do with it—

I do what I do out of love for my God and His truth,
 and out of love for lost sinners
 and for the Lamb of God who comes to take away the sin of the world.”

It’s possible that some of his family, friends, or disciples resented that.

These are the stakes.

This is why Jesus shocks the crowds and us
 with such strange and uncomfortable words:

**“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate
 his own father and mother and wife and children
 and brothers and sisters, and even his own life,
 he cannot be My disciple”** (v 26).

What’s gotten into Him?

And what about all that **“love one another”**
 and **“let brotherly love continue”** (Heb 13:1)?

What about **“Honor your father and your mother”**?

It even makes me wonder too about Jesus’ own immediate and extended family.
 On one occasion, at least, some of them showed up where He was teaching
 and tried to silence Him.

Like they were ashamed of Him.

“Jesus, if you loved us, you wouldn’t say those things,
 or make those enemies,
 or live like that.

Don’t you know you’re embarrassing us?”

Hate here doesn’t mean to despise, detest, or dislike them.

It’s all about the comparison.

Jesus’ loves His Father in heaven and the mission He’s been given above all things.
 John the Baptist loves His Lord more than His own head.

So what is it that you love most?

I suppose you could say that Jesus is big on truth in advertising.

He doesn’t put this in the fine print

or include it like the chipmunk-speed disclaimer at the end of a commercial.

He puts it up front.

He says it in the open.

Just in case anyone is on the fence.

Just in case *you* were thinking about joining Him . . . about being His disciple.

He tells you the worst-case scenario—

the ultimate in what we must be willing to give up.

Now, of course, many of us will never be called to this . . . but it could happen.

And there are Christians to whom this *does* happen. Even today.

But imagine what it would be like if you were a Muslim who became a Christian.

What that would mean for your relationships

with father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters.

For your livelihood and your life in your village and among your people.

But maybe you do know what it's like a little bit.

Maybe your family doesn't understand your attachment to Jesus.

Why can't you spend even *one* Sunday morning with them?

Maybe your friends don't get it and wonder what's happened to you.

Why can't you hang out with them and do the things you used to do?

Why can't you be more accepting and just love them for who they are?

As if it should be okay for us to love Jesus a little less

and care about them a little more.

As if they were to say,

"If you come to me and do not hate Jesus,

you cannot be my father or mother, my husband or child,

my brother or sister, or even my friend."

So it's not about being cruel to the people around you.

Jesus isn't teaching us to be morose or depressed about this life.

The command to honor father and mother still stands.

Love your neighbor as yourself still sums up half of God's law.

But it comes after the first and greatest commandment:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength."

There's an order to our loves.

First God, then father, mother, wife, child, brother, sister, and your own life.

So, what is it that you have to give up, let go, and leave behind *today*?

What attachments are getting in your way of being His disciple and following Him?

Do you remember what Jesus asked St. Peter when they had breakfast on the beach after His resurrection?

"Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?"

More than these fish?

These people?
This job?
This lifestyle?
These dreams?

Yes, in following Jesus there are often things that have to be left behind.
Things that we can't hold on to while holding on to Him.
Choices that must be made.

When the roads diverge, which way do you go?
When your Lord Jesus Christ and your family are at odds,
with whom do you stand?
And even if there's not a big division at the start,
consider that over the course of a thousand miles
even a one-degree difference in direction will put you in far, far apart in the end.
The same is true over a lifetime—over 50 years or 80 years.

One thing that must be left behind, of course, is sin.
That *should* go without saying, but there—I said it anyway!
There's no option to follow Jesus and to cling to your sin.
“Both” is not an option.

But there may be other things, too.
There may be things that are fine in themselves but not fine for you.
Friendships that put you in compromising situations.
Jobs that force you into unethical decisions.
Habits, interests, and loves that hinder you from following Christ—
it could be how you use our time,
or how you use alcohol or legal substances
or how you use social media and the internet.

Jesus said, **“You can't serve two masters”** (Lk 16:13).
Either you will love the one and hate the other . . .

If Jesus is our Lord—and that's what it means to be baptized like Monica
and what we say every week in the Creed
and what we confessed when we joined the Church,
as Steve & Kerry Gould do today—
if Jesus is our Lord,
then *He* has total claim on our lives.

And to follow anyone or anything else like that will cost us Him.

That's the first part of what Jesus teaches—

to count the cost by asking, "What do I have to give up *today*?"

The second part is similar, for He says,

"Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple" (v 27).

This isn't about what we have to leave behind, but what we have to carry.

What is it that Jesus is asking you to *bear* today as His disciple?

In following Him, what have you taken on?

What is it costing you now?

Just as there's a cost to building a tower or starting a war,
so there's a cost to being a Christian.

Jesus wants us to know what the cost is and be ready for it.

He wants us to be prepared for the long haul with Him

to follow not just today or tomorrow but all the way to death.

Some are just curious about Jesus and after a while turn aside.

Some embrace Him with joy but wither in the heat.

So, therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all he has cannot be My disciple (v 33).

With Monica in her baptism,

you again renounced the devil and all his works and all his ways.

Maybe we need to add another:

Do you renounce all that you have? Everything, even the good?

Do you renounce your own life for Him?

Yes, it's a lot to ask.

St. Peter said it: **"Lord, we've left everything to follow You."**

It's a lot, but it's worth it.

The things that are most worthwhile often cost the most.

We don't value things that are cheap.

We replace them.

But we treasure things that are costly—including our faith.

It's worthwhile because of who Jesus is and what He's done.

When Jesus set out to love His Father and glorify Him,

He counted the cost.
When He prepared to build for us a tower that can never fail,
He counted the cost.
When He planned to make war on sin, death, and the devil,
He counted the cost.
What it would cost to redeem you and to take you through this life
into the life of the world to come.
The cost was not in gold or silver.
It was the cost of everything He had.
His holy, precious blood.
His innocent suffering and death.
His own life.

He bore this cross for you.
**They took Jesus, and He went out, bearing His own cross,
to the place called the Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha.
There they crucified Him** (John 19:16–18).

See what He was willing to give up for His Father and for you.
See His unconditional, total love and commitment.

He finished His course.
He went the entire way.
He didn't stop when it got challenging.

He is our tower.
He is our refuge of strength.

Then the third day He rose from the dead.
Whoever loses His life will gain it.
Whoever believes in Him will live even though he dies
and whoever lives and believes in Him will never die.

And because of what He did,
we do what we do in following Him.

St. Paul said
Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. (Phil 3:7)

The saints in Revelation **loved not their own lives even unto death** (Rev 12:11).

They had something of even greater worth than their own lives.
We have something of greater worth than our own lives.
We have Jesus Christ as Lord,
 His help and support now,
 and the promise of the endless world to come.

So, dear Christian,
 be strengthened and encouraged as you follow Jesus on the way there.

The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ
Jesus.

Phil 4:7
