

The Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 18)  
St. Luke 14:25-35

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple." Those opening statements sound an awful lot like what you heard from Him three weeks ago, about not coming to bring peace but division, and while there are similar sentiments in these two accounts, today's is for a different purpose...a different teaching.

With these words, Jesus implores you to count the cost. Counting the cost is always a good idea, as Jesus explained.

- If you're going to build a tower, you're going to count the cost. You figure what the materials and labor is going to cost and balance that against your budget in order to insure that you have enough to finish to job. Otherwise, you'll be mocked as one who began a job you couldn't finish.
- Or, going to war, a country's leader also counts the cost. He consults his advisors to see if his forces can match the other forces, which outnumber him two-to-one. Is there some strategy that can be employed to give his outnumbered army an advantage? If no solution can be found before the battles begin, it's best not to go to war rather than declare war foolishly in the face of insurmountable odds then send peace envoys seeking to surrender.

And having given those two examples, Jesus then said, "So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."

You see, by this time, Jesus had developed a reputation among the common people in and around Judea. With that reputation, He had accumulated a large following. People joined this large throng of followers for one reason or another. However, a follower—or tag-along—does not a disciple make. Therefore Jesus turned to the crowd and announced, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple...any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple." To turn from simple follower to disciple, one must separate themselves from what was left behind, count it as loss for Jesus' sake, forsake it to the point of hating it. It's a heavy cross to bear, but that's the cost of being a disciple. Count the cost, Jesus implored, count the cost.

Being a disciple is about love, at least in part. Love is a very costly thing. It's like I tell those whom I am about to marry, "Love is sacrifice for another. Love is hard work; it is the work of serving another. The more one loves, the harder one works." That is what love truly is, not some romantic notion invented by screen writers. Love is not about what one gets from another but about what one gives to another. It is forsaking everything for the sake of another. And so, in marriage, it is said that a husband and wife are to leave mother and father and be joined to each other, forsaking, in a sense, everything else that they knew for their spouse.

The cost of discipleship is the same. It is love for the Teacher and His teaching over and above all else, even to the point of hating everything else and forsaking it. It is sitting at the feet of the Teacher, listening to Him, learning from Him, trusting solely in Him, relying on Him, being given to from Him.

"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."

Those other things are not important when it comes to being a disciple. I could go down the First Commandment road here: "You shall have no other gods before me," that is to say, "We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things." And it's true, and to a point, that's what Jesus is saying. Being His disciple is fearing, loving, and trusting God above father and mother, above wife and children, above brothers and sisters, yes, even above one's own life! I keep saying to a point because these all can be forsaken to a particular point because God in Christ has them all in His hands. He cares for these as He cares for His disciples—because He has died for it all. Well and good if father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters are disciples, too, but even if they are not, it does not impact one's being a disciple because God cares for them, too.

And there's another important point to make. Jesus is not imploring you to count the cost as empty words. He's not giving this as advice that has no pertinence to Himself. After all, what is a tower to God? He can raise up and raze down a tower in the blink of an eye. What is the largest army of men to God? No strength of man can match His might. Who is He to tell you to count the cost?

Who are you to question that? Remember that love is very costly. God has considered the cost of love. Out of love for his fallen creation He sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law to redeem those under the Law, and the price for that redemption—the cost—was His own life and blood, given and spilled for the forgiveness of sins. As His Son was hanging on the cross dying, Jesus cried out, "'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'" (Mark 15:34) God the Father forsook His own Son as the cost of His love for the world, as He gave His Son as a ransom for His fallen creation, held captive to sin and the devil.

"And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last." (Mark 15:37) No, one can't say that the cost of love wasn't considered by the Son, either. For one, He did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but humbled Himself by taking on the form of His own creation—the form of a man. (cf. Philippians 2:6-7) The Son left His own glory in Heaven, forsaking it, out of love for creation. His own life was the cost of gathering to Himself a spotless Bride, as St. Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:25-27. The Son left His Father and mother for the sake of His Bride, the church, and gave His life as Her ransom...as **your** ransom.

He came as man to die, but He is also true God, therefore death could not hold Him in the grave. Christ is risen, the firstfruits of a new creation, you could say. After all, that's how St. Paul put it:

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. (1 Corinthians 15:20-22)

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. (Romans 6:3-5)

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Even Jesus Christ Himself declared, "Behold, I am making all things new." (Revelation 21:5)

So, if Jesus Christ has made all things new, then He has made fathers and mothers, wife and children, brothers and sisters new, yes, even your own life! So, while being a disciple may mean hating these things, forsaking them for Christ's sake, it does not mean abandoning them. If, in Christ, you are called to the vocation of child, you do not abandon your mother or father, whether they believe or not, but you hold to your love of God over and above them; and in your love for God, you love them. If, in Christ, you are called to the vocation of husband or wife, father or mother, you do not abandon your spouse and children, whether they believe or not, but you hold to your love of God over and above

them; and in your love for God, you love them. If, in Christ, you are called to the vocation of brother or sister, you do not abandon your siblings, whether they believe or not, but you hold to your love of God over and above them; and in your love for God, you love them. Yes, even your own life—as a disciple you are never asked to take your own life, but remaining faithful to God, remaining a disciple may mean that your life is taken from you. “Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life,” Jesus declared. (Revelation 2:10)

Thus, the disciple bears his own cross. Following Jesus, loving Him over and above all else, sitting at His feet, listening to Him, learning from Him, trusting solely in Him, relying on Him, being given to from Him—all of that is bearing the cross of discipleship. It’s an easy cross to bear, as Jesus stated, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:29-30) That’s the cross of discipleship, the light burden His disciples are called to bear—the burden of being given to and being forgiven in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

As a disciple, then, you are the salt of the earth. (cf. Matthew 5:13) “Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?”

How are you salt? When you bear your cross to the world.

- When, as a disciple of Christ, you live as one redeemed to father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and everyone else placed in your path, without regard to your own life, secure in the knowledge that God in Christ holds your life safely in His hands.
- When, as a disciple of Christ, you live as one redeemed by daily contrition and repentance drowning and killing the Old Adam in you with all sins and evil desires that a new man should daily emerge and arise by God’s grace to live before Him in righteousness and purity forever.
- When, as a disciple of Christ, you live as one redeemed by receiving Holy Absolution from your pastor as if from God Himself, not doubting, but firmly believing that by it, your sins are forgiven before God in heaven.
- When, as a disciple of Christ, you live as one redeemed by receiving the Sacrament of the Altar worthily, having faith in the words, “Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins,” for those words show you that in the Sacrament, forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given you through those same words. “For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.”

What a joyful privilege and task you have as one redeemed to God in the blood of His Son, emboldened to do so by the power of the Spirit of God.

You are salt because you are a disciple. You are a disciple because you bear the cross. You bear the cross because you are forgiven for all of your sins.

“He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.