

July 24, 2022 The Price To Be Paid Luke 14:25-35

At first glance it seems to be such a casual conversation. The crowd was large. They were travelling. No doubt some people joined. No doubt some dropped out. I mean, they are not unlike us. They have lives to lead, things to do. They have to choose when and where to be. Life was very different from the frenetic pace of 2022. But you can count on this: people in that crowd, and the crowds plural that followed Jesus, had continually to make choices about where to be and when to be. Priorities. Choices.

And very suddenly, Jesus just stops. In the middle of the road. HE turns and HE faces them and drops this bombshell, as though it were the most natural thing in the world to say. HE means it. HE is serious. As serious as HE can be. “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.” Such is the claim Jesus makes upon us. It is a call to radical, some would say, fanatical, discipleship.

It is easy to understand how some would come to the conclusion, HE can't be serious! The language used is almost awful. Outlandish. And yet the fact is that Jesus is serious. HE is as serious as HE could ever be. HE sees people opting in, and opting out. It is noteworthy that the episode begins with the simple fact that “large crowds” (plural) were

travelling with HIM. I said it and I meant it. The KJV confirms this translation even though it uses a different word. "Large multitudes were travelling with him." The crowds were large but not singular. I repeat, people opting in and people leaving and opting out. HE saw it. HE understood it. And that is why HE stopped and turned and addressed them, as HE did.

HIS business, HIS mission, HIS being with them and leading them, and teaching them is not a casual matter. It is life and deathly important. He understands though they may not how it is all going to end, where it is all going to lead. This involves the reality of Calvary, an execution. While Jesus is doing something HE wants to do, at its heart it is not about fun and games. It is serious...as serious as life can be.

I will share this with you. When Jesus says one must hate mother and father, wife and children, brothers and sisters and even their own life, or, he or she cannot be HIS disciple, HE is not talking about hate that despises or results in cruelty, even double mindedness. HE is not saying that family commitments and marriage vows do not matter. HE is saying that priorities matter. HE is saying that HE insists on being the ONE who will have our first degree of allegiance. He is saying every other commitment in life must be second or third or fourth to the commitment made to follow HIM down this dusty road, to the villages and towns and the city of Jerusalem. To the lessons HE will teach them. To the miracles HE will perform before them. To the cross that will ultimately be the instrument of HIS dying and rising from death on the 3rd day. There is a price to be paid,

a cost that must be met and honoured in following Jesus. No commitment we make in life is as important, as is the one we make to HIM, to be HIS disciple, for HIS disciple is what we have become.

On this dusty road in Galilee, HE makes it plain to everyone within hearing, that HE makes this claim on their lives, blood and bone. It is sobering. It is serious. And yes, Jesus calls us to a sacrificial allegiance. Him first, and all others after. His claim does not mean that HE does not believe in marriage. HE does. Radically so! HIS claim does not mean that family is unimportant. HE believes family is very important. But he also believes HE has the right to claim first place in our hearts, our minds, our souls and bodies. HIS words echo the reality, "Thou shalt have no other gods before ME!" His claim makes visible in flesh and blood, that the God we meet in Jesus Christ, is a jealous God. HE is not willing to be second fiddle to anyone, or anything else. HE insists that HE alone is the leader of the band, the shepherd of the flock.

We can well ask, did Peter understand this? Did Matthew or John? Did Judas Iscariot? It comes pretty easily to our minds to cross Judas off the list of true believers. But when we consider what happened on that Thursday night when Jesus was arrested, dead the next afternoon, buried before sundown on that precious, precious Friday, and the twelve scattering and hiding, trying to make themselves safe....Judas throwing away the money he had received and then, killing himself in remorse for what he had done. No! It is a pretty safe guess, not one of them had taken the lesson on that dusty Galilean road

seriously. Until Jesus rose from the dead.....and renewed HIS claim on their lives. Body and soul, blood and bone.

I wrestle with the concept of retirement. What I am beginning to understand, is that there comes a time when health, age, condition become liabilities. When one must to some degree be led instead of leading. I can see that my days are numbered. Do not take that to mean that I expect to die soon! But I cannot haul freight the way I once did. I need help rather than to be the one who gives it. That is hard to face, and harder to admit. Radical allegiance, requires submission, which is the real definition to faith in Jesus. HIS will, God's will be done.

What I am beginning to recognize, because there is a part of my mind and heart that still rebels at the idea that I am not as capable as once I was, but the fact is I am not as capable as once I was. Submission to the Lordship of Jesus requires that I recognize that that is not an opinion, it is a fact. I am going to have to accept that reality. So mark my words, when I leave you at the end of this year 2022, I will not be pretending I can do this with another congregation. You are and will be my last. Because I cannot do, what once I did, with the facility with which once I did it. In fact I will only be able to finish the job I accepted in January of 2011, if I come to grips with the current reality, And accept it. Submit to Jesus who has truly ordered my lot.

Faith in Jesus, my Lord and my God, has led me to recognize the the end of this phase of my service to HIS Kingdom, to HIS church, is though not immediate, within view. I can see it coming. And I can no longer deny the reality.

Jesus has been incredibly honest with us every step of the way. HE has told us all along, from beginning to end, that the commitment of faith in HIM and to HIM is dangerous. HE has never asked some of our energy, or some of our life. He wants. He demands all of it. Part of what I am trying to figure out these days is how may I continue to serve HIM, when I cannot serve Him as I have been doing and attempting to do. I am not used to attending services of worship, I am used to organizing them, leading them, making them happen. With the help of others? Of course! But choosing the elements. Choosing the lessons to be read, composing the sermons, praying the prayers. Some would say being in charge. I have never seen it that way. I have believed and I still do, that I render service. I am having to figure out how I shall render a different kind of service.

Did you notice what Jesus said at the end of that verse 27? “And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me, cannot be my disciple.” The cross is an instrument that terminates life. it causes intense pain, Mental anguish. Soul rending pain. I must, (I underline) I must take up this cross of ceasing to be at the front of the crowd, in order to continue being HIS disciple, for disciples we must be if we believe Jesus.

Not terribly long ago I listed how 11 of the continuing 12 disciples died. Each of the 11 were killed for publicly believing in Jesus and doing HIS work. They died young compared to me. John lived to be an old man. He outlived Mary (Jesus mother), whom he cared for on the instruction of HIS Lord. In part that was John's cross, living to be an old man. I will have to wait to see, if I get to be in my 90's. My cancer surgeon thinks it is possible. What I am asking my Lord for these days, is the wisdom and the faith to take the remaining steps in my commission as a disciple. I understand that to be Jesus disciple means I must do so joyfully. I am not done. Not yet. To God be the glory. The cross, my cross, is not easy to carry, but then, neither was Jesus cross easy to carry.... And HE carried His, in part, for me.

Let us Pray;

Lord Jesus it is not easy to deal, to cope, with change. Grant that I may not complain. Grant that I may love those about me, as you have loved me. Make it possible for me to enjoy the days that remain in my service here with these who I have come to think of as friends, fellow soldiers of the cross, and family. Receive the glory of the worship we offer together to YOU as Redeemer and Lord. Amen