

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity, September 13, 2020**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 424, 425:1-2, 410, 417:1-5, 413:6.

Lessons: Proverbs 9:8-12, Romans 8:28-39, Luke 9:22-27.

Sermon Text: Luke 14:25-35.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Jesus is coming toward the end of his three-year public ministry. *“Large crowds were traveling with Jesus,”* many for the free food, free medical care, and other miracles he was providing. Many may have just been curious about this man who was preaching and teaching with authority they had not heard from their local rabbis. Our text has Jesus talking about

**THE COST OF BEING A DISCIPLE**

- 1. Jesus must come first in the life of one who wants to be his disciple.**
- 2. Listen as Jesus gives examples of reckoning the cost.**
- 3. But remember that real disciples are salt in the world!**

There were probably some people who expected Jesus to say ‘Come and be my disciple and I will give you great riches and honor.’ But he tells them just the opposite.

Jesus is very blunt. If you aren’t ready to forsake all you have you cannot be his disciple.

We’re not talking about earning heaven. We are talking about the cost of being Jesus’ disciples, the cost of really following Jesus. They must renounce all self-ambition and self-interest for Christ. They must be ready to bear a cross, even to be willing to die the death of a martyr for the cause of Christ, just as Stephen did.

Look at the examples from Scripture. Stephen literally, actually gave up his life. Tradition tells us that the apostles also gave up their lives because of the message they preached.

Although *“Large crowds were traveling with Jesus”* that will not always be the situation. When he was taken prisoner by the leaders of the Jews and Roman soldiers, he had been betrayed by one of 12 men closest to him whom he had chosen to be his apostles. And even then, the eleven who had vowed that they would never deny him ran away and abandoned him until after he was crucified. In fact this happened within hours of when one of them, *“Peter replied, ‘Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.’ ‘I tell you the truth,’ Jesus answered, ‘this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.’ But Peter declared, ‘Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.’ And all the other disciples said the same.”* Matthew 26:33-35.

But what happened between the time large crowds were following Jesus and the time he was abandoned by all men, and even forsaken by God, his own Father?

Scripture tells us that Jesus’ preaching contained many *“hard sayings”, “hard teachings”* (John 6:60) and *“From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.”* John 6:66.

There are three conditions Jesus sets for following him.

First of all, the love of Christ must precede all other love, even that of the nearest friends and relatives. Absolute devotion to him and to his cause requires that natural love to one’s relatives be relegated to the background, that life itself be denied, that the heart be torn away from temporal possessions. There must be a willingness to leave behind family ties and even one’s own life. God must be first in the life of a Christian.

Jesus wanted to encourage whole-hearted discipleship. All other loyalties – even to members of one’s own family – were to be secondary to the loyalty and affection he demanded of those who want to follow him.

When our duty to our parents or any family member comes into competition with our duty to Christ, we must give Christ the preference. If we must either deny Christ or be banished from our families and relatives, as many of the New Testament Christians were, we must rather lose their friendship.

Every man loves his own life, yet we cannot be Christ’s disciples if we do not love him better than our own lives. To become his followers means to give up all that is precious, yes even life itself.

Remember the first commandment and Luther’s explanation? **“You shall have no other gods.** What does this mean? We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.” That means putting God FIRST in our lives. That is surely something we cannot do by ourselves, without the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit working daily in our lives. Nothing dare come before Jesus in the life of the disciple.

If any one comes to Jesus seeking to be a disciple, sacrifices are necessary from the point of view of this world. First of all, the love of Christ must come before all other love, even that of the nearest friends and relatives. In Matthew we hear Jesus say **“Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”** Mt. 10:37 Natural love for one’s relatives must be pushed into the background, and life itself must be denied so that the heart be torn away from possessions of this world. There must be willingness to leave behind family ties including the tie to self.

The second condition is to carry the cross. As Jesus speaks here of **“their cross”** it does not refer to the afflictions and troubles which commonly come into the life of all people. Instead “the cross” means to accept whatever suffering might result from a sincere commitment to Christ and his kingdom. For many disciples of Jesus their confession of Christ would mean death.

Jesus isn’t just trying to gather a huge crowd of supporters who could protest his arrest and trials. He wants true disciples.

Jesus makes it plain that a life in which “the self” comes first is a life lost, but a life lost for his sake is a life saved. You heard in our gospel lesson: **“For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?”** Lk. 9:24-25. Following Jesus involves carrying a cross for Jesus’ sake. Gaining the whole world by forfeiting eternal life is not worth the price. Jesus is talking about both physical and eternal life. Remember the goal and the end of bearing the cross for Jesus: victory and the joys of heaven!

The third condition for following Jesus is the willingness to give up all earthly possessions. Jesus says: **“any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.”** The cost of following Jesus is high – but worth it. After all, following Jesus leads to eternal life. Not following Jesus leads to eternal damnation. But it is foolish not to reckon the cost of following Jesus. Remember, many in the large crowd were no doubt following Jesus for free food, or for miraculous healing, and their heart was not really following Jesus. They were like people who follow any leader who promises, offers and maybe even gives a taste of earthly things which we think we want.

Then Jesus gives three illustrations to make these points. First he says **“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.’”**

He talks about a man who plans to build a tower, which is a costly project. There must be a willingness to make a sacrifice. He must be sure to sit down and count the cost.

For disciples of Jesus it will cost them a life of self-denial and watchfulness. It may perhaps cost them their reputation among men, their liberties, and all that is dear to them in this world, even life itself. And if it should cost us all this, what is it in comparison with what it cost Christ to purchase the gift of heaven for us, which comes to us free, by grace!

Jesus is deceiving no one with false promises. On the other hand, Satan shows the best, but hides the worst and in that way deceives.

Jesus’ second illustration speaks of a king starting a war without a big enough army to finish the job. **“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.*" If he finds that he couldn't win the war, the best thing he can do is to send an ambassador to talk about peace. Careful planning must also govern the actions of a king thinking about going to war.

Both of these parables teach the necessity of considering the costs. They represent the absurdity of those who seek to be part-time or half-hearted disciples of Jesus Christ. Luther rightly pointed out that [anyone who] "will be a true disciple of Jesus Christ shall require no less than the mighty power of God to support him, as both hell and earth will unite to destroy him."

Jesus' last illustration is salt which loses all its taste. Remember that salt in Jesus' day was not always the totally pure salt we use today which dissolves completely. Salt was often contaminated with sand and if the saltiness should be leached away, it became flavorless. Such salt becomes totally worthless, not good for use even on a manure pile to provide fertilizer.

There needs to be careful self-examination before joining the crowd of pilgrims following Jesus on the road to the cross. Being a follower calls for renouncing family, self and possessions. Half-hearted commitment won't do. True disciples of Jesus are willing to give up everything for him.

We are reminded of Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount: "***Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.***" Matthew 5:11-14.

Salt is a seasoning. The Christian adds seasoning to the world to make life slightly more palatable while living among outwardly wicked unbelievers. Salt is also a preservative. It is because of the Christian that the world has not already been destroyed, but will be destroyed in God's right time. And salt is also an irritant in a wound. The Christian's life, actions, and words irritate Satan and the world. As long as salt is strong, it has value for seasoning; but if it becomes tasteless, it has lost its purpose in the world. It can no longer be used in the preparation of foods. It is to be thrown out since it is worthless. If the purifying influence of the Christians in the midst of the unbelieving world ceases; if the Church is no longer a power for good by the preaching that is done from its pulpits and by the example of the life of the hearers of that preaching, then flavor and value are both lost. If Christians – or those who confess to be Christians, or think that they are counted among Christians are not true witnesses for Christ, they are worthless and are hypocrites to be revealed on judgment day.

The lesson ends with the words "***He who has ears to hear, let him hear!***" For many so-called Christians mere outward formality seems to be sufficient. But God looks upon heart and mind, and demands sincerity in confession and service.

But remember that God is on our side. Remember that God is fighting for all Christians. Remember the words of our epistle lesson: "***And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.***" Romans 8:28. Rejoicing we say "***If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?***" Romans 8:31-32.

With Paul we can say with confidence: "***For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.***" Rom. 8:38-39.

The Christian says "***I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.***" Psalm 119:32 (KJV) We don't need to be dragged like a reluctant child, but we willingly follow our God – we run with him! It is a simple fact that Jesus tells us in Mt. 6:24 "***No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.***" May we serve our Lord Jesus Christ every day! Amen.