

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Tenth Sunday after Trinity, August 28, 2011

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

Hymns: 421, 422:1, 423, 398, 48.

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,

Suppose you have been fascinated by some leader and he seems to be just what you want. No, I am not just talking about someone making promises to make your life better.

I am talking about a real person who is providing you with food. He is providing glimpses of an unbelievable health care. He speaks of a better life.

Well, it should be obvious that I am not talking about a politician in the United States. I am talking about Jesus Christ. But after giving food and miraculous healings, Jesus now speaks 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!**

The Word of God today tells us that *"Large crowds were traveling with Jesus."* But you know that that will not always be the situation with lots of people following Jesus. When he was taken prisoner by the leaders of the Jews accompanied by 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 given the impression that they would never deny him ran away and pretty much 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?

There came a time when 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.

What kinds of things lead to that point in his life? Well, today's sermon text is one of them. Luke's gospel records that Jesus had been healing people and feeding them. The *"large crowds"* no doubt included people who followed him for just this reason, and not because he preached the truth of God's Word. This is the second time he speaks of the high cost of really following him. Our gospel lesson today records the first.

There are three conditions Jesus sets for following him. First 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. 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 Him, seeking permanent discipleship, sacrifices are necessary from the standpoint 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 10:37 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;"*** 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.

The second condition is to carry the cross. As Jesus speaks here of "the cross" it does not refer to the afflictions and troubles which commonly come into the life of Christians and non-Christians alike. 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.

But Jesus makes it plain that a life in which I, that is "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?"*** Luke 9:24-25. Following Jesus involves carrying a cross for Jesus' sake. Gaining the whole world by forfeiting life is not worth the price. Jesus is talking about both physical and eternal life.

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 or 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. The builder will make sure that he has enough money to finish the job before even starting. Otherwise he will be a laughingstock to his neighbors. If a man wants to build a tower, something quite prominent that would show his wealth or prestige or power, wisdom will dictate that he sit down first and calculate the cost very carefully. He must go over his plan thoroughly and make sure he can bear the cost. If the man should start to build and then find that it is impossible for him to finish the project, he will become an object of ridicule for passers-by.

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. Wisdom and careful planning must also govern the actions of a king who is thinking about going to war and has broken off diplomatic relations with another ruler. He will call in all his advisors and make very careful calculation whether he will be able to carry out his plans in case he should decide to start a war. And in case it seems doubtful he could win, he will prefer to enter upon negotiations with the enemy, and find out what the enemy would require to make peace.

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."

Finally Jesus uses the illustration of salt which loses all its taste. We must pause here to be reminded 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.

There needs to be mature, 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. Unless this happens, the follower will be like a builder who can't finish his tower or a king who cannot win his war. When the going gets tough, allegiance to Jesus will grow cold. Half-hearted commitment won't do.

Because complete self-renunciation is required, serious consideration is absolutely unavoidable. True discipleship of Christ demands so much, and that much the true disciple will give cheerfully.

The very fact of self-renunciation brings out the genuineness of the discipleship. 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 a preservative. It is because of the Christian that the world has not immediately 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 in its wickedness. 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 for the table. 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.

This is an impressive lesson, emphatically brought out by the Lord's 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 His 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."*** Romans 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 Matthew 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.