



THE COST OF IT ALL

September 4, 2016, The Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 14:25-33

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Dear Lord, we thank you for your unconditional love. For you, constantly reaching out to us with open arms. Because of your love, and the example of love that we have witnessed in Jesus, help us to love you back, living in ways that exemplify that love. In your Great Son's name, we pray. Amen.

Today's text ought to have all of us squirming in our seats a little, for the cost of discipleship is far greater than one would think. At times we may catch ourselves saying, "It's so easy, all we have to do is believe." But is it really that easy or is there a cost?

It sounds to me like Jesus is saying belief ought to be met with sacrifice. Not just sacrifice but *great* sacrifice. Jesus just turned to a large crowd that was following him and said, "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."

Jesus gave up his life for everyone, for every single one of us. He lived on earth in human form. He went through all the things that we all go through. But because he believed in God, because He had faith in what God was doing through Him for humanity, he gave up His life. Knowingly and willingly, His entire life, He was headed toward that cross.



He calculated it all and He left His family. He left His friends. Jesus went on the road, on a journey with few possessions and because of His faith He paid the ultimate sacrifice.

Because of God's great love for us, His unconditional love for us, He sent His only son to die on a cross. And because His son had faith in Him and in us, His Son hung on a tree. That's the cost of discipleship. Of devotion. That's what Jesus is saying is the cost of love. At least, that's what it sounds like to me.

A couple of weeks ago I was with my parents down at their cabin in West Virginia and on the last day of our trip I was having the end of trip blues. Didn't want to leave. I love it in the mountains. The peace, the quiet, the outdoors and my family. But it was coming to an end and I was sad and there was the beloved family dog, Tucker, just waiting. Sitting. Waiting patiently for each person to wake up and come out of their rooms so he could greet them. And then he and I had a moment. He looked me in the eyes and I felt his peace. His love. And it flooded me. Filled my bones and my heart. Radiated inside of me and I was happy. Happy to love him, and hug him, and to just be. No more blues.

Gratitude. Grateful to have the unconditional love of a dog and therefore grateful to love him back and to be willing to scratch his back, rub his belly, you know the drill. Tucker's joy and love filled me with the same love and joy, it was reciprocal.

That dog, Tucker, is the most grateful creature my dad has ever been around. And for that my dad is devoted to him. Not a disciple of a dog or any cockamamie thing like that but he loves him back. Cares for him. Enjoys sharing his food with him, taking him on hikes, all sorts of things that in return make the dog happier, and even more grateful, if that's even a possibility.

So, if God loves us and we love Him back, how can we show Him that? What is OUR cost of discipleship?



Well, I've got an incredible example of discipleship for you today, but it will take me a couple of minutes to get there. A group of Brick Church high schoolers, as well as two Brick parents and myself, went on another mission trip this summer. Originally we had planned to go down to Guatemala but having been following the news about the spread of the Zika virus, we knew we needed to make a change of locale. So we called Next Step Ministries and explained our thoughts and concerns. They understood completely and were kind enough to make room for us at an already full location. They were able to send us back to Braxton County, West Virginia. And it was so nice to go back to a familiar community, familiar people and surroundings. What had been a "10" of a trip the previous year was even better this year, if that's possible.

So this year we went back to West Virginia and had the privilege to begin a new build. It was grueling work, yet very rewarding. Being the first group on the site for the summer meant we got to dig holes. Thirty-three-inch-deep holes, through dirt and rock, by hand because the brand new, two-person, gasoline-powered earth auger couldn't even work its way through it. All this so we could lay the best possible foundation for a home. I kid you not, if the earth happens to shift on that hill, that home will still likely be there in good shape. Because when we laid in those holes all the posts on which the house will be built, we created them and cemented them into the ground in a way that if the house tries to lean one way, the other posts will pull it back down. It was tough work. It was good work. But it's still not even close to the example I am going to share with you about the cost of discipleship.

While we were on our trip we met someone, our new friend Lynn, who will be the owner of the home we were helping to build this summer. She is agoraphobic, has lupus as well as other "difficulties" going on in her life. She is a gem. We weren't sure we would have the opportunity to meet her that week because she is a homebody, doesn't get out much. She's scared to come out of her house. Uncomfortable with strangers. Sad with the way she looks. Her anxieties have had her pulling at her hair, so she wears a bandana to cover the missing spots. And she's got some scratches on her face because of her nervousness.



But surprise, surprise, on that Monday morning. That first time we walked up from the street to our worksite, there she was. She came out and greeted us. And the kids were incredible with her. They walked up the little hill to her one by one, naturally keeping their distance from each other in line so as not to overwhelm her. First it was Walter and he simply said, “Hi, I’m Walter, and it’s nice to meet you.” And on it went until they had all introduced themselves to her. And you know what, Lynn saw God in those kids that day. She saw Christ and His disciples.

But then Lynn blew us away! The kids had been so loving, so nonjudgmental, that she came out of her house, set up a chair right next to the worksite, and sat in it all day. The Holy Spirit was at work in all of it. We all bonded: Lynn, Ann-Marie, Peter, the high schoolers, all of us. We all saw God that week in ways we could never have imagined. We left our homes, our families, our friends, our parents and our siblings. We left our internet, our email, and in some ways our lives behind and we followed God out into the mountains of West Virginia. We followed Him, not to the cross, but to the laying of wooden posts that would be the foundation of something new.

Another great thing, discipleship-type thing, that I had the honor to witness was in the commitment of one of our high schoolers to make sure no one ever felt left out. Even on the simple nightly trip to the convenience store, down the block from where we were staying, he would make sure that everyone got an invite. That everyone was accounted for. It was incredible to observe. His love, his kindness, it was admirable, and he didn’t even know he was doing it. It was, it is, who he is.

And it was also amazing to see all of the kids on the trip getting along. They didn’t argue or fuss. They intermingled. Left their clicks at home. Were happy to be with whoever, whenever and did not judge each other, tease each other, condone or condemn. You would have never known it was a group of young adolescents. They were incredible.



And now, finally, to the best example of the cost of it all that we saw on the trip. While we were there we reconnected with an old friend of ours. A person whom we had gotten to know really well the previous year we were there. A person we love and hold dear. A woman named Dani Ramsey.

Dani and her husband, Clarke, run a ministry there. Together they have spent the last 15 years building a community center in the small, poor town of Rosedale. In addition to building the center, they have been hosting hundreds of mission groups.

Dani and Clark uprooted themselves from Ohio 15 years ago and have been ministering and missioning to the locals in the community ever since. They build relationships with broken people. They meet them where they are, in their homes, at the store, wherever they may find them and they work to bring the Gospel, as they would say it, into the hearts of those people they meet.

They have patience like none we have ever seen. They get to know people bit by bit and as trust develops they help those people by rebuilding their hearts and by bringing in groups to help rebuild their homes. To fix their plumbing, if there is any. To visit. To cook. To serve. To share stories. To live with them. To pray and worship with them. And to break bread with them.

Dani and Clark gave up everything and they went out into the mission field. They are the ones who worked with Lynn for 15 years in order for people to be able to begin building a new home for her. They felt she needed to be out of her decaying house years and years ago. But she wasn't ready. And they weren't going to push. To overstep. They just trusted God to open the door to opportunity. They built the bridge for Brick Church to get to know Lynn. To commune with Lynn, for her to have the opportunity to teach us many things and for us to be able to love her.

The Ramseys are incredible examples of what it means to be true disciples of Jesus Christ, of what it means to count the cost and to follow. The Ramseys, as missionaries, live on little. They live well and comfortably, but they make every penny stretch. They use and reuse things. They also don't ask for more than they



can use and they would never take advantage of someone's generosity. They give and they give, of themselves and of their means.

On her blog Dani wrote about the approaching fall and she said, "Sometimes looking back is a good thing to do before we look forward. As we all take a moment to look back on our past seasons and prepare for the imminent change before us, we should ask the question: What significance has my life had in light of eternity?"

And she continues by saying, "As a busy disciple, wife, mother and minister, I constantly have to ask myself if my priorities are in order. Too often, I am sure that I fall short by exchanging the temporal for the eternal." She says, "One thing that I learned many years ago is there are only three things that are eternal: God, the Word of God, and the souls of men and women. This one sentence helps me keep my life focused on what is really important — God, His Word, and people."

Dani emphatically says, "Start this season fresh! As we all 'turn over a new leaf' when fall begins, the weather changes, and seasons change — remember that every day we have the opportunity to serve God, love our neighbors and live for the glory of the King and His Kingdom."

This from a woman who has already devoted her life to doing the work of Christ. She has counted the cost, she has followed the call, she hasn't finished the race but she sure seems to be running it faster than me.

So how can we repay God for what He has done for us? Yes, His love is unconditional but there are ways we ought to love back. To sacrifice. So how can we carry our cross in order to follow Him and be His disciples?

Are we ever really leaving our comfort zones and following God? I assure you that if we do, if we are willing to sacrifice parts of our lives to follow God, we will reap for ourselves more than we could have ever imagined or hoped for. That by counting the cost and giving things up like time, money, energy, and focus on



serving Him, we will gain more than the world has to offer. We will find peace like none other. Happiness like no other. A joy that cannot be rivaled.

Another pastor wrote the following about today's text. She said, "To learn, to encounter, to unravel mystery, to belong to God alone, all these require leaving, really leaving, in order to be open to the unexpected and unknown presence of God, who will be found not according to the rules, and not by the book, and not in the customary places, and not without fear, passion, deep prayer, and reflection on the strangers you have found each day, and the homelessness you have known."¹

Let's all leave our comfort zones in some way today. Let's all count the cost of discipleship and know that Christ went before us and goes along with us. That by leaving, we are really returning. That by working and striving, we are actually finding peace and rest. So come, let us journey to the cross. Let us count the true cost of it all and follow God into the unknown and unexpected. Let us lay down our lives for Him.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.

¹ Nancy Rockwell, "[Leaving Home](#)," *The Bite in the Apple*, 2013.