

Scriptures: Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Luke 14:25-33

The Busyness of Life

September's almost always a busy month. Kids and adults working with them are back in school. Politicians are busy making speeches and gearing up for November elections. Businesses are reshuffling shelves and prepping for the rapid succession of holidays we'll celebrate soon – Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. All around us we see signs of the busyness of the shifting season, moving rapidly from Summer to Fall, or in the Church calendar, the wrap-up of Kingdombtide – that season after Pentecost – in just a few short weeks, and the return of Advent.

As I worked on this sermon, sitting at our kitchen table, I can see off in the distance that some of the leaves on neighbor's trees are changing from green to a light yellow, and in some cases even a burnt orange. Autumn is on us friends, and in a few short months we'll celebrate again the coming of the Light wrapped in the flesh of Infancy, to shine on the dark places of a sin-sickened world. As we enter into this time of rapid change, of deadlines, due dates, and the busyness of life, do we stop to count the cost of what we do, and why we do it? If you have your Bible with you, or a Bible app, turn with me to Luke 14:25-33. I'm reading from the New International Version Bible today. **Read Luke 14:25-33.**

Before we start talking about the specifics of what's happening in our Gospel lesson this morning, we need to understand some of the context of where this was happening, and why Jesus was talking the way He was to people. If you look back at the beginning of Luke 14, Jesus is at the house of a Pharisee on the Sabbath. We don't know the particular Pharisee, just that he's an important one. And Jesus has just healed a man who was there – which, of course, you know what the Pharisees think of that! No good deed goes unpunished!

Skipping ahead to verse 15, you see that Jesus is still at the dinner table at Phil Pharisee's house. That's a good sounding name, right? So it stands to reason that our passage this morning is also occurring in the vicinity of Phil Pharisee's house. They may have finished eating, and the crowd is waiting outside. When you see Jesus doing what He does in the gospels, there's almost always a crowd around Him. People were drawn to Him. They're still drawn to Him today through what we say and do!

Hate Your Family?

“Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them He said: ‘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,’ (Luke 14:25-

26). Those are some harsh sounding words! Does Jesus really mean for us to hate our parents, our spouses, our children, or our own lives? Now let me pause here, because there are a lot of people who will tell you that everything you read in Scripture has to be taken literally. It's black-and-white, and that's it. They see these couple verses, and the next thing you know, they've got a crisis of faith on their hands.

How can God, who loves us so much that He would die for us, tell us to hate people – especially people in our own family? Friends, when we read Scripture, we have to consider the type of writing of the particular book or even passage we're looking at. The Bible's a library of 66 books. Some of them are poems, others are letters telling us how to live. Others are historical records, and still others – like the passage today – are to make a point and get us to think.

There are some people who would hear me say that, and automatically jump to the conclusion that I don't believe the Bible, or believe that it's God's word. I grew up in a church like that – if you questioned what the Bible said, you were on the highway to Hell. God gives us reason. He blesses us with a brain, and He wants us to use it, so we can know Him better.

So now back to this question: does Jesus want us to hate our families? We see the example He gives us in Scripture – of His sacrificial love – so how do we answer this particular question? Should we hate our families? Certainly not! He wants us to lovingly guide them – and all other people we interact with – into deeper relationships with Him.

Following Is Not Easy!

I think what Jesus is trying to convey to us here – to the crowd that day – is if we put greater value on something else than what we do on following Him, we're not really His disciples. Notice what He says next. "And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow Me cannot be my disciple," (verse 27). Does that mean every one of us is going to literally carry a cross? No. We aren't the ones crucified. Jesus is – for the whole world.

Now, that's not to say that following Him is going to be easy. It's not easy. It's hard to repent – to turn your life around and follow Him. When you're used to living life large and in charge, and doing things, treating people, and using people however you feel, and suddenly answering to this new Boss – Jesus – who tells you to love others as you love yourself. That's tough! That's hard work. That's what following Him is – treating people with dignity and kindness, even when they don't deserve it.

They don't! And we don't either – but He loves us, and He changes us. He makes us capable of loving people who don't deserve to be loved, because He also loves them and paid a terrible price to prove it. God counted the cost – and decided

that redeeming the whole creation through the death of Christ on Good Friday's cross was worth it to restore right relationships in the world.

That's the big-takeaway for us today. He counted the cost, and we were worth it. We are worth it. Those marginalized people in our society, in the world, even in the Church – they're worth it. He loves them. And He drives this idea of counting the cost home with two stories He tells in our passage.

Bridge to Nowhere

“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,’” (verses 28-30). There are lots of people who start things, and then don't finish them. We have politicians, both Democrats and Republicans, who do these sorts of things!

Have you ever heard of “the Bridge to Nowhere?” It was a \$228 million project the Federal Government came up with in the early 2000's to connect Ketchikan, Alaska, with another island where the nearest airport was located. The bridge never got built, but the road on the island with the airport did – at a cost of \$28 million. The 3 mile road sits empty today – completely unusable. One end of it is against the bank of the channel where the bridge was supposed to go, while the other end is underground inside the airport terminal.

What a waste of time, and taxpayer money! Sometimes you see this to a lesser extent in families, or even in the Church. We start projects – I've been meaning to paint all summer, and haven't gotten to it yet – but don't finish them. We don't count the cost, in time needed, manpower, money, resources, and so on. That's just our human nature – we want stuff, but we're often not willing to work hard to get it. Jesus knows that.

Mikhail Gorbachev

“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,” (verses 31-32). We see that play out over and over again in world history. Kings, or as we call them today, Presidents, think they're big stuff, only to find out later that they're not. This past Tuesday, Mikhail Gorbachev died. He was the Communist Party boss, and final President of the Soviet Union. He came to power in 1985.

Gorbachev shocked the Communist world, the whole world really, with his ideas of “glasnost” (openness) and “perestroika” (restructuring). And as a result, the hard-line Communists attempted a coup, in August, 1991. I wonder if Gorbachev counted the

cost. In Soviet history, coups were usually successful, and the top dog usually mysteriously died.

The one against him didn't immediately remove him, but he later resigned as President of the Soviet Union on Christmas morning that year, transferring all his presidential powers to Boris Yeltsin, the President of Russia. The Soviet Union had ceased to exist. Do you think Gorbachev counted the cost when he became President? Do you think he ever thought, "Gee, if I wouldn't have done that, I'd still be large and in charge?"

Gorbachev was such an outspoken critic of Vladimir Putin – especially of Putin's war on Ukraine – that Putin refused to allow his family to have a State funeral for the guy. When Putin started his war, do you think he counted the cost? How many Russian and Ukrainian lives have been lost for Putin's vision of resurrecting the Soviet Union? How many more people, of various nationalities will die before that war comes to an end? I don't believe Putin, or very many presidents-who'd-rather-be-kings actually count the cost in regards to the lives they impact through the conflicts they decide to do.

Jesus Counted the Cost

A sensible king, or president, is going to be concerned about the welfare of their people. Before they jump into a conflict with another nation, they're going to count the cost. They're going to value the lives of their people. A good leader is willing to make self-sacrifices for the best interests of those who follow them. Jesus Christ is a classic example of this. Jesus counted the cost, and proved how much He loves us on the cross. He literally sacrificed Himself for us, because it's what was in our best interests. And because He's given us the example, He now expects us to do the same.

"In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be My disciple," (verse 33), He told the crowd gathered around Phil Pharisee's front porch that Sabbath afternoon. Something Phil Pharisee didn't know, and the crowd had no idea of, but we do, is what Jesus would go on to do. Lay down His for His friends – and that's us – and then He picked it back up and left the tomb empty. We know this, because we're the Church. But in our dealings with others, both within, and beyond the walls, do we count the cost? Do we show we're following Him in what we say, and how we deal with other people?