**Count the Cost...and Repent**

Based on [Luke 14:25-35](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Lk14.25-35)

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In today's gospel lesson, we hear of great crowds accompanying Jesus. This is a period in his ministry where he is still pretty popular with the crowds. It's a time in his ministry where Jesus ascended to the top of the charts and we still have yet to see if he's is more than a one-hit wonder, or if he has staying power. He has moved from Obscurity (Who is this man who does such wonderful signs?) to stardom and celebrity and popularity. **And so what does he do? Does he use his popularity to ingratiate himself with more people? Did he think making himself popular was the goal of his ministry?** Many churches seem to think that, you know. They think it's their job to make Jesus popular, give him a makeover...and the pastor's his publicity agent. Many people seem to think it's their job to make Jesus popular, and that means not teaching hard and confusing things that would "turn em off."

But that's not Jesus. He doesn't just want a bandwagon. We know this, because at a certain point in his ministry He begins to teach things that will make him unpopular. **He teaches three things today, hard things, impossible things that would be sure to shake any straddlers off the fence.** These are not new things in Jesus' teaching, but he starts laying them on thick, listing three hard teachings at once and in succession. These crowds are wannabe disciples, "yeah Jesus you're soo cool and we support you bro"...and so Jesus is telling them the "cost of true discipleship." In short, Jesus says that being his disciple doesn't just mean giving him a thumbs up. To be his disciple you need to (1) hate your family, (2) suffer all things, and (3) give up everything that's valuable to you.

There it is folks...do you want to be a disciple of Jesus?...He lays it out right there. In short...renounce everything in this earthly realm...your family and yourself...your happiness and your personal property...that's everything. How's that for a church discipleship program: "**Do you love your family and believe in yourself? Do you hate to suffer? Do you save money and buy things to make your life easier and more convenient?...Then our church is not for you. Then discipleship here is not for you. Then following Jesus is not for you."**

"And if you would rather put family first; avoid suffering at all costs, and give only a fraction of what you have away rather than everything...you'll have better luck up the road. 'Cause I'm sure you'll be able to find a church that says you're following Jesus just fine if you give only 10 percent, or if your loving your family by ignoring their sin, or by volunteering for some charity work every now and then."

All this to say, folks, that no one "seeks out" true discipleship. No one. If you honestly count the cost of discipleship, you would find that nobody ***wants*** to follow Jesus, no matter how much they sing love songs about "**giving themselves" to him.** They might want to be "in his loving arms"...so long as he's off of the cross and on a couch, next to their children, warm and safe and clean.

A couple months back, we heard from the gospel an account where a man looks dreamily into Jesus eyes and say, "I will follow you wherever you go" and Jesus turns him away saying, "**Yeah well, get real son...you don't have what it takes...to be my disciple**"

All discipleship programs...about how to follow Jesus more deeply, love him more sincerely, surrender to him more fully...they are a **farce**. I mean, have you ever taken part in a "discipleship program?" Do they mention any of these things? Renouncing everything...family, personal happiness and private property? No, what a discipleship program does is soften discipleship, or redefine it into something easier than what Jesus says here. "**Hate your family**" means, "**Bother them until they come to church.**" "**Take up your cross**" means, "**Don't be afraid to say stupid and corny things for Jesus.**" "**Give up all you have**" means "**Be sure to give your required ten percent, then you're a good steward.**"

Ironically, discipleship programs try to teach people how to follow Jesus by loving their family, by avoiding stress, by giving away some stuff while still keeping most your stuff. They teach you how to be one cut above the rest of us "normal Christians" by following a set of "doable" principles, "pointers" that will indicate your "special level of discipleship." That's modern evangelicalism folks, and it's the new monasticism...promoting a "Higher Level of Discipleship and Holiness", so that you can be surely sure that God will bless you and save you.

Ladies and Gentlemen, you need to remember what it means to be a Lutheran. "Lutheran" is not just a brand name within Christianity, like Nike or Reebok. Lutheranism is the honest face of Christianity. And being a Lutheran means knowing the difference between Law and Gospel.

Or more precisely, being a Lutheran means to know the Gospel...period. The Law is what God really expects of you...."Do This...Don't do that!" And when you face the Law...you realize just how far from the kingdom you really are. And once the Law has made you face that fact...that you are a poor miserable sinner...that is the first blessing. Because finally when you see your ugliness, you won't want to look at yourself anymore. **So you turn away from the mirror and your vanity and lo, someone is standing there.** If you can tear your eyes away from yourself even for one second, then maybe you can see Jesus. The Law makes you look at yourself, and if your honest, and unless you got your beer goggles on...you'll realize that you are not saveable. The Gospel has you get off of yourself and look at Jesus who says, "Fear not, though you are unsaveable...I have saved you."

Jesus is preaching the Law here. I mean, he has to be. Do you really think you are able to hate, that is, renounce your family to follow Jesus? Are you capable of living a life of constant suffering and persecution? Are you strong enough to surrender all your saving and possessions and live only on the safety net of faith. If so, then why haven't you? If so, then you have a pretty high opinion of yourself. If so, then you have no ears to hear the gospel because you don't need it. If you can do it yourself, then you don't need Jesus, because you are him...and you might as well stay at home on Sunday and worship yourself. If you really think you are able to keep the first commandment...that is truly fear, love and trust in God above everything...then you are a Pharisee, **who believes in your own righteousness and your own ability to save, and--according to your own heart--you really have no need of a saviour**.

One time, two of Jesus apostles wanted to sit...one on his right and one on his left hand in the kingdom of heaven. And Jesus says, "**You don't know what you're asking, Are you able to drink the cup that I drink?"** In other words, "**you haven't counted the costs, will you be able to bear my cross?"** And they say, "**Yah sure, donchya know, We are able to do that...cripes! Whadya take us for?**" Not long after Jesus is arrested at Gethsemane and he's taken to the cross. And when that happens these "so-called" disciples run away like their pants are on fire. How embarrassing.

Here it is ladies and gentlemen, Jesus is telling you that you need to hate your family, suffer all things and have nothing in order to save yourself...why?...**precisely to make you give up on saving yourself.** God led the Israelites to the Red Sea, and as Pharaoh's army was upon them on one side a vast sea on the other, and they could see that they were trapped **and that it was impossible for them to survive**. So too, Jesus tells you these things to make you see that salvation is impossible. And when you see that salvation is impossible, Jesus words of Law and Gospel finally reach you..."**yes with man it is impossible, but not with God, for whom all things are possible."** And then Moses lifts his staff parts the Red Sea, then Jesus lifts his arms on the cross and parts you from your sin...then God does the impossible to save his unsavable people.

There are two types of Christianity out there, so be on guard. Either you have to save yourself, or Jesus saves you. Either Christianity is about you striving to be a disciple, or it's about Jesus who IS the one and only disciple, because you constantly aren't. Either your own righteousness must save you (good luck), or you find refuge under the cover of Jesus' righteousness. Either you pay the cost of salvation or Jesus does. And what Jesus is doing here is saying, "Before you choose, I'd suggest you count the cost."

Jesus says in the gospel, "**How many of you, desiring to build a something, doesn't matter what it is, a house, a garage, a backyard shed, does not first sit down and count the pennies to make sure you have enough pennies to finish the building. Cause if you don't, you're gonna start, you're gonna lay the foundation and it's not gonna get finished and everyone's gonna laugh at you, "Hey, Look at the idiot who thought he could do what he was totally unable to do." What king is going to go out against an army twice his size?...nobody's gonna do that. Well friends, look at the army of sin, death, and the devil that has gathered against you. Are you able to overcome it?**

Here, every Sunday, in this Lutheran Church, you count the cost of building your own tower to heaven. You do a personal inventory to see whether you have enough of what it takes to complete the "**project of salvation**." You contemplate going to war with sin, death, and the devil and you count the cost. You add up whether you have the force to fight the devil, or whether you'll have to make a deal with him. You consider your sinful condition and count the cost as to whether you can follow Jesus to the cross, and (in uniquely Lutheran fashion) you freely admit..."**No I do not have what it takes, for I am by nature sinful and unclean**."

Every Lord's Day, you come together with the rest of us incapable disciples and freely admit, "**Lord God, I am a poor miserable sinner**." **It's not just that I'm not perfect, or that I make good intentioned mistakes. It's that my heart is turned inward so that even when I begin to follow you, I end up following myself."** You say, "**Almighty God, merciful Father, I have counted the cost, and I know that if I have to go to war with the devil I will lose. If I have to build my own tower to heaven I won't be able to finish, and I will be mocked."**

Ladies and Gentlemen, you count the cost and you repent. You confess that you don't have what it takes to follow Jesus to the cross, and you throw yourself upon the mercy of God. You sit at the lowest seat of the table because you know that if you sit any higher, you'll just get kicked down. You throw yourself at the mercy of God and say, "**Please forgive me, a sinner. Have mercy on me. I cannot follow Jesus. I don't have what it takes.**"

And finally, when you are helplessly caught between Pharaoh's army and the Red Sea...when you finally see that you are truly unforgivable, that's when Jesus says, "**Arise, take your mat and go for I have forgiven your sin.**" Jesus says, "**Yeah, with you salvation is impossible; but with God all things are possible. "For I did it, for you. I counted the cost of building a tower to heaven and you know what?...I paid it. I thought through what it takes to engage in war with the devil--the prince of this world who has twice the soldiers I do--and I didn't have to bargain for peace. I measured it, and I won it without compromise or diplomacy with the devil**. **Sure, I was mocked--on the cross...by onlookers saying,** "**He would save others but he cannot save himself**." But on Easter morning I had the last laugh. Cause that's when I stormed Satan's castle and preached victory to and over the spirits in hell, and rose again preaching peace to my disciples on earth.

And now, Ladies and Gentlemen, even today Jesus says to you, "**I have established peace on earth, not for those who meet a "higher level of discipleship," but for those pathetic disciples who have counted the cost and realize they cannot build their own salvation**." Tell me, which of his disciples did not run from the cross? And yet, which of his disciples did he not save by it? Only Judas, who tried to buy back his own salvation by returning the thirty pieces of bloody silver. Peter was forgiven for his tears.

You were created to be salt, yet through Adam you have lost your saltiness. So Jesus asks you, how will you gain your saltiness again? How will you become worthy enough to be kept around and not thrown out? By being seasoned with righteousness. And what does that consist of? Taking a Saturday morning workshop in "***true ultra-super-mega-discipleship*?**" No, you are seasoned with righteousness when you are seasoned with Jesus. And you are seasoned with Jesus by ***receiving* him...in word and body and blood and baptism *through* faith, with nothing of your own to offer**. That's how you are sure God has blessed you and saved you.

And so you have received Jesus...!? Does that mean you are now set free to worship your family, dodge suffering and gather hordes of possessions for yourself? Of course not. But it does mean that you have nothing to boast in, nothing, except the cross of Christ. It does mean that when you look at your health, wealth and relationships you will finally see how shallow they really are. **For when you see with your own heart the depth of the love of God, you don't have to *strive* to give up your precious things, because you will see they have no value anyway.**..no value, that is, apart from the Lord and King who went to war for you and won! He who has ears let him hear the gospel!