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St. John's Lutheran Church of Burlington
7 September 2025

Sermon on Luke 14:25-35

Worship Theme:

COUNT THE COST

This week Jesus' sharp words expose our desire to pursue comfort and avoid pain at all costs. Jesus explains that following him will be hard. Jesus promises that discipleship comes with crosses—a unique type of pain. So, Jesus tells us that we must count the cost of following him. But whatever is lost as we follow Jesus pales in comparison to what we gain.

Sermon Theme: “Count It Up!”

1. What We Give Up to Follow Jesus
2. The Infinite Treasure He Give Us

What does it cost? People tend to ask that question a lot. When we're at the store trying to figure out what to buy, what does it cost? When we're planning to make bigger purchases, such as furniture, a car, or even a house, what does it cost? When we're planning a vacation and trying to figure out where to go, where to stay while we're there, what activities we'll do, and where we'll eat, what does it cost? Of course, none of these things are the most important parts of our lives. They are possessions and experiences we get to enjoy for a short time, and then they're done, and hopefully the cost was worth it. But what about our faith? We have faith in Jesus as our Savior and we've been called to live a life that is appropriate for his followers! So Jesus wants to make sure we have the answer to a very important question: What does it cost?

In our reading from Luke today, Jesus is on the road toward Jerusalem. He finished dining at the Pharisee's house (our reading from last week), resumed his travels, and, as usual, a large crowd is following him. This sounds like something that should make Jesus happy, right? People wanted to hear more about him and learn more from him! But Jesus knew that not all of them were following him for the right reasons. By the grace of God, some were. But others were likely only interested in seeing what the next miracle would be, or hearing what great wisdom he would share next, or maybe some only wanted to be spectators as Jesus unleashed a super controversial statement, causing mayhem all around him. Following Jesus could be a very entertaining thing to do!

But the Holy Lord of heaven and earth didn't take on human flesh and come into this world just to be the 1st century's version of Netflix. So Jesus needed to share a hard truth with the crowd about what it means and may cost to follow him: *“If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”*

Wow. That sounds like a great way to turn a large crowd of followers into a pretty lonely walk to Jerusalem. “Hate your family, hate your life, and carry your cross.” It sounds drastically different from what God says in so many other places throughout his Word. Isn’t he a God of love? Doesn’t he tell us to love each other? How can that same God also tell us we should hate the people closest to us?!

Luke doesn’t tell us how the crowd reacted to Jesus’ words, but it probably wasn’t all that different from how you and I reacted. We’re shocked. We’re scared, confused, maybe wondering if we got something mixed up and started following the wrong Jesus. Or worse yet, maybe following Jesus isn’t actually what we thought it was.

We don’t need much help from our sinful nature to question this teaching of Jesus – simple logic certainly struggles with it, and our feelings and emotions make us wonder if God has finally gone off the deep end. Why would he give us families and friends and people who are important to us only to then turn around and say now we should hate them. On top of that, Jesus then says we should hate ourselves and our lives too. Many people struggle with negative self-worth, low self-esteem, and feelings of self-doubt, and it can be very difficult to overcome such thoughts and feelings. So why would Jesus push such a heavy burden on us?!

Maybe your pulse has gone up a bit and your heart is starting to race. At the very least, maybe you furrowed your brow a bit as you try to make sense of all this. Jesus says hate family, hate self, hate possessions. But it just doesn’t make sense. What happened to all the times God told us that everything we have is a blessing from him and should be regarded as such? What about the times when Jesus taught us about stewardship and taking proper care of what we have? Frankly, this sounds like a teaching that doesn’t belong in the church. We should read Scriptures that talk about the blessing of family and how important the family unit is and how desperately we all need a good family. But this? This is hard. This makes us want to do something else with our time today, closing our ears and telling Jesus that we’ll come back when he’s ready to tell us nicer things.

But Jesus never promised all his teachings would be nice. He did, however, promise that all his teachings are necessary and important. So instead of asking why God would ever say something crazy like this, perhaps we should be asking, “What about us and our sinful nature made it necessary for Jesus to teach this?”

The answer to that question is easy: Jesus needed to teach this because we’re very good at putting other things ahead of him and considering them to be more important than him. And that’s not good enough for Jesus. It is crucial for our eternity that Jesus be the first and most important in my life and in yours.

So back to our original question – what does it cost? Because Jesus loves us enough to be honest with us no matter what, we know he will always tell us the truth, even when it’s hard for us to hear. Following Jesus is not a lifestyle that will always be super easy or never have problems. Often it means giving up some other very important things in our lives. For example, maybe we give up time that could be spent doing other things. We all know how important the weekend is – it’s time to go up north or go camping, time to clean the yard or the house, time to put in a little overtime at work, time to get the crops harvested, time to hang out with your

spouse and kids... there are so many important things we want to do, many of which can only be done on weekends!

And it doesn't stop with time. Following Jesus also means the generic "world out there" isn't going to do us a whole lot of favors. Finding a job might be harder, people who used to be our friends might change their minds, and we might not get to pursue our passions and hobbies as deeply as we want. Sometimes, following Jesus hurts. When friends and family turn their backs on us because we follow Jesus, that's very difficult and painful to deal with. Or when so badly we want to do something, but God said it's a sinful thing and we should not do it, we struggle saying "no" to those desires. And all the special possessions we've gathered over the years? Jesus says, consider them worthless.

Right before this sermon, we sang: "Jesus, I my cross have taken, all to leave and follow you. Let the world despise and leave me. Come, disaster, scorn, and pain! In your service pain is pleasure, with your favor loss is gain." [CW'21 #694] So did you mean it? Are you really willing to deny yourself the so-called "pleasures" of this world, especially if they involve sin? Are you willing to endure and even embrace a more difficult and painful life, as followers of Jesus frequently do? Are you even willing to give up your life for Jesus and the Gospel if that's a decision you someday face? It's a lot to give up! Have we really truly **counted up the cost** of being a follower of Jesus?

But before you walk away because this is all too much to handle, there's something else we need to count: everything JESUS did. As we live our Christian lives, it can be so easy to get hung up on what God sometimes asks us to give up: time, money, special opportunities, maybe even family and friends. But all those things pale in comparison to what GOD gave up AND what he has given TO us.

Jesus gave up heaven. Eternal life in heaven is the whole point of being a believer in Jesus – it's what we look forward to, what we can't wait to experience, and we're so excited to someday find out what it's like that we often can't express it in words. We're not even told that much in the Bible about the details of heaven because it's not something words have the ability to describe – it's THAT GOOD!

But Jesus gave it up. Why? To come save us. He gave up heaven to become a human being just like us, choosing to be born and live in a broken sinful world. Not so that he could experience what this life is like, but so that this life wouldn't be as good as it gets for us. Jesus left the perfect glory of heaven to do everything necessary for you and me to live forever with him.

He didn't stop there either. Jesus didn't come to live a cushy life on earth – he was born into a poor family, worked hard growing up, and eventually lived a life on the move. He didn't have a home during his entire ministry. He didn't have many possessions. His time was rarely free because people were constantly asking him things, kind of like whenever I visit the preschool or kindergarten classrooms in our school and all the children want to talk and ask things at the same time, except that, for Jesus, it would be that times several billion – people constantly talking to him and asking him for things all at once.

Then Jesus took a completely perfect sinless life, having never disobeyed a single one of God's laws, and gave that up too by trading it for ours. He took his

perfect life and handed it to us, and he took our filthy sinful broken lives and took them straight to the cross. There he died to pay for and forgive all our sins, taking us off the path of eternal death and putting us onto the path of eternal life.

Do you realize what all that cost? We know so well what it costs us to be a believer in Jesus, because we **Count It Up** all the time – “God asks for this many hours of my week, I need to put this many dollars in the offering, and I have to give up this, that, and the next thing too.” But what did the cross cost? How many sins did Jesus pay for when he died on it? What is the price of eternal glory and perfect life for you in heaven? Did you **Count All That Up?** Because that’s what Jesus thinks you’re worth. Let me say that again, because it’s super important, so please don’t miss this. Jesus willingly got up off his throne in glory and left heaven to come to a sinful world, then was nailed to a cross where his holy blood poured out to pay for sins more numerous than you and I will ever know. Although we will never know anything close to what that’s like, Jesus knew exactly what the price was to save us. He Counted It Up and decided you are worth it.

Through Jesus, we have been given a treasure that never perishes, spoils, or fades. (1 Peter 1) When we look at our lives through the lens of what Jesus has already given us, we gain a better perspective. When Jesus asks us to give up a little time, it is because he wants us to hear again about the eternity he won for us. When Jesus asks us to keep the people, possessions, even thoughts and desires, in their proper place and position in our lives, it is because all these people and things must never replace Jesus as the #1 most important in our lives. Only Jesus gives us things that are eternal. Nothing and no one else can ever do for us what Jesus has already done.

So to anyone who has ever wondered what a life of following Jesus costs, he gives powerful encouragement mixed with a hard truth: “**Count It Up!**” Count up the cost of everything **we may be asked to give up if we are to faithfully follow Jesus** all the days of our lives in this world. And then also joyfully count up the cost of everything Jesus gave up for us and see **the infinite treasure he gives us freely by grace through faith.** Jesus is our perfect Savior from sin and the only Savior we will ever need. He has already prepared for us an eternal heavenly home infinitely beyond our wildest dreams, and he presents it to us freely at no cost to us – the entire cost has already been paid in full by Jesus. Our faith is a gift from God, forgiveness a gift from God, and eternal life a gift from God. No cost for us at all. Now we have the beautiful privilege and opportunity to live our lives faithfully following him, always keeping him first and most important, and eagerly looking forward to enjoying the infinite eternal treasure Jesus has won for us. For this and for all the priceless blessings in our lives, to him be all praise and thanks forever. Amen!

And the peace of God which goes beyond all understanding will guard and keep our hearts and our minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.