

Natalie W. Bell
September 4, 2022

Counting the Cost
Luke 14:25-33

Now large crowds were traveling with him, and he turned and said to them, ²⁶ *“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.* ²⁷ *Whoever does not **carry the cross and follow me** cannot be my disciple.* ²⁸ *For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and **estimate the cost**, to see whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him,* ³⁰ *saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ ³¹ Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³² If he cannot, then while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. ³³ So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.*

How do you **count the cost** of a new journey, or a new project—
how do you know if you have what it takes to do it?

And what do you do when you **think you’ve counted the cost**,
but things change along the way?

When ***Lewis and Clark*** set out to explore the West, they thought the land would be like the east, and they would be using canoes for much of the journey. But along the way they ran into mountains, and had to adjust everything.

Tod Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*,

In the book ***Wild***, and the subsequent movie of the same title, ***Cheryl Strayed*** decides to hike over 1,000 miles of the ***Pacific Crest Trail***, on her own.

She ***counts the cost***.

She buys all the equipment, she mentally prepares,
but when she starts hiking,

she learns that her boots are too small, and her pack is too large.

So, she spends weeks with sores, aches, and pains,

until she receives help and new supplies,
sometimes even from kind strangers.

She considers *quitting*.

But something in her is determined to finish, so she *keeps on going*,
counting the cost along the way.

She pushes through to the end,
and becomes stronger than she ever thought possible.

How do you *count the cost* of a difficult journey or project—when
you know there is sacrifice and suffering involved?

Let's be honest---Things that are worthwhile usually challenge us!

If you want to play *guitar*—you need some serious callouses on your left hand.

If you want to run a *marathon*—you need some serious miles run in your running
shoes.

But how *do we count the cost of following JESUS?*

What if following Jesus is a little like Strayed's journey on the Pacific trail?

Jesus' words are challenging, the journey is difficult to say the least.

Following Jesus is not for the faint of heart.

EVERYONE is welcome, we hear that again and again from Jesus,
but *not everyone will follow*, and become a disciple.

That requires counting the cost of this journey called faith.

But what if by following Jesus,

we too develop *spiritual callouses and muscles* along the way?

What if by following Him we become *stronger* than we ever thought possible?

Have you ever noticed that to be *true*?

And could that be exactly *what Jesus wants* for us?

These words of Jesus are not easy.

They are *hard words*--- *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.

Wow.

Now the word for *hate* here is hyperbole, and it means *put aside*,
but still, Wow.

And Jesus goes on.....

*So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not **give up all your possessions**.*

Another hyperbole, but Wow.

Everyone is welcome to follow Jesus.

But following Jesus is *not for everyone*.

Because there is a cost—and that cost involves carrying a **cross**, that cost is *reliance* upon God instead of ourselves or our possessions.

Which is totally *countercultural*,

and the opposite of what we're inclined to do as human beings.

In our Presbyterian tradition, we generally focus on God's *grace*, but here the focus is on the *cost* of being a disciple.

I was reading this week about a big steeple pastor in Charlotte, North Carolina who read this passage and then told his church:

*"If you cannot heed this call, then you ought to **renounce your baptism**".*

Ronald P. Byars, Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol. 4, pg. 49.

Wow.

Another pastor referred to our baptism as the *"fine print of discipleship, written in water"*.

Ronald P. Byars, Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol. 4, pg. 47.

Now, let's think about that-- isn't that true?

In baptism we are baptized into the *death* (the cross) and the *resurrection* (the life) of Jesus Christ!

In baptism we take on a new way of life,

and we *count the cost of following* our Lord and Savior Jesus in that new life!

When we recount those promises as we *join a church*—

we again count the cost of following Jesus!

Jesus' words might seem harsh,

but don't we *give our BEST* to those things and people that are most valuable to us?

Don't we *spend our time and money* on those things and people we care about the *MOST*?

The question is:

Do we feel that way about our *relationship with Jesus Christ*?

About our *family of faith*, the church?

Do we?

Are we *committed* to being disciples, and not just Christians-in-name-only?

And what are we willing to do to follow Jesus?

You know, over the years, churches have tried to put this cost into '*requirements*' for church membership.

Some churches still do this, whether overtly or not.

These church 'expect' that you live a certain way, vote a certain way, and socialize with only approved people.

The Puritans of the 1630s

required a *conversion* experience for church membership!

Other denominations have required *abstinence* from drinking, cards, dancing, movies, gambling, or other activities.

Connections, Year C, Vol. 3, pg. 302.

In our tradition the *ONLY requirement* for membership

is a belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior,

which to some people sounds like we are *watered-down* Christians!

But what if it's actually *asking MORE* of us as disciples?

What if it's actually *more costly* to focus on Jesus as Lord and Savior,

because if we really believe that Jesus is our Lord and Savior,

that means we have to *dedicate our WHOLE lives* to Him—

not just Sundays, or during church activities,

but *EVERY day and night, and EVERYTHING* about our lives—

our social activities, our politics,

our relationships, our money, and our time!

Believing in Jesus as Lord and Savior is a *demand on our whole life*.

It's a *radical* commitment.

And a *transformation* of who we are at heart.

It affects everything.

If we take this seriously, we change.

We can *no longer participate* in the division of culture, the us vs. them mentality, the tribalism, the greed, the power grabbing. The back-stabbing.

We can *no longer support people or policies* that go against the ways of Jesus, the way of *love* of God and neighbor, the *turn-the-other* cheek, put *others* first, *humbly serve*, willingly *suffer*, and *include* everyone ways of Jesus.

That's *asking a lot!*

And yet, that is what Jesus is asking of us!

Will we do it?

How could we even embark on such a wild journey?

Well, what if it's like making Jesus our *True North*?

Just like I showed the kids that compass, and how to find your way because it always points due North!

Ronald P. Byars, Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol. 4, pg. 47.

What if *Jesus is supposed to be our True North*?

What if life is all about what he did? What he said? What he taught?

Taking it so seriously that we *LIVE by it*.

If Jesus is asking us to count the cost, he is asking us to *PRIORITIZE our lives*.

When he says we must hate our family, he's saying we *put Him first*, then family.

When he says give up our possessions, he's saying *put Him above* any possessions, and *rely upon Him* more than what you own.

To prioritize our lives, we need direction, don't we?

We need a *model, and a destination* for our faith.

And what if that model, and destination, is Jesus himself?

What if we find our priorities, from His life, death, and resurrection?

Jesus often told his followers to not worry about their money or possessions, but to trust in God. After that part of his Sermon on the Mount,

In *Matthew 6:33* Jesus said: *Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you.*

In other words, *make me your True North*.

When in doubt about *which way to go*—follow Jesus.

When in doubt about how to *treat* people, or who is in or out—follow his Great Commandment, to love God and our neighbors as ourselves.

When we don't know what to do with our *abundant blessings*
 or the *little bit* that we feel like is barely getting us by—follow Jesus,
 and store up treasures in heaven, not on earth.
 Because what we own can easily own us,
 which is probably why Jesus said we should *give up all we possess*.

Following Jesus is not for the faint of heart.
 It requires *some sacrifice and some suffering* along the way, doesn't it?
 But isn't that true of any major journey in life?

Just think about the journeys *we don't get to plan--*
 Like the illness of a loved one.
 The day of the heart attack, the stroke, the diagnosis,
 and there's no time for wondering whether you are prepared—you just do it.
 You stay at the hospital, you take care of their needs,
 you pay attention to all the medical jargon.
 You put affairs in order.
 You make the sacrifices that need to be made.
 When life takes us down a new and difficult path,
 we just *put one foot in front of the other*, and keep on walking, right?

But there's *something more for those of us who follow Jesus!*
 We have something to ground us, guide us, and direct us.
 We have Him--our *True North*.
 We have a Savior who takes our hand and holds us each step of the way.
 Who gives us supernatural strength and courage to keep going!

I met with a woman this week who told me that she never would have made it
 through all the hard times this year—loss, illness--without God.
 How many times *have you said the same thing?*
 Why do we say that?
 We say it because it is true!

We can *never be totally prepared* for any of life's journeys.
 We do not know what lies ahead for church, or parenting, for school, for marriage,
 for life without those closest to us.
 We don't know what it means when we say we are Christians.
 And we will never get all of it right.

But we still embark on the journey,
 Because we have *someone who will be with us* through it all. A guide.
 We have our *true North*--Jesus—who has gone before us,
 and will hold us as we travel, wherever this journey called life may take us.

Counting the cost of discipleship is *not a one-time deal*.
 Following Jesus is a *lifelong PROCESS*.
 It's a journey full of sacrifice, and struggle.
 It is not just about gaining new beliefs about God,
 It's not even just changing our behavior, or being 'good people'.

It's about finding a *totally new life. Real life*.
 It's about finding the *kingdom* of God that Jesus preached—a kingdom with
Real joy. Real peace.
 And the journey of faith is the journey to *God's GRACE*.

The call to follow Jesus is challenging,
 but it is also a *gift of God's grace to be able to do it*.
 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the great Lutheran theologian and Pastor who stood up to
 Hitler, wrote in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*: "the call to discipleship is a gift
 of grace, and that call is inseparable from grace".
 Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol 4, pg. 48.

He went on to say: *Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow,*
and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ.
It is costly because it costs a man his life,
and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life.
 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Touchstone: NY, 1959, pg. 45.

Following Jesus is *not* just about us *pulling ourselves up* by our bootstraps.
 It is not about us just making *sacrifices and working harder*.
 It's about us following a Savior who will *carry* us on this journey.
 A Savior who has promised us the *Holy Spirit*,
 to give us the *power* to keep on going.

It's a call to follow---that comes with a *gift of grace* to do it.
 Jesus *himself helps* us follow Him!
 No other journey is like this.
 In the *world's eyes, we are on our own* in life.
 But as followers of Jesus, we are *NEVER on our own*.
 We always have God's power and presence inside us, empowering us, directing us.

Friends, hear the *Good News* of the Gospel.
All are welcome, but not all will follow Jesus.
Those who do will be asked to *count the cost* of the journey,
and the cost *to Jesus* for going ahead of us.
The path is not easy,
but it is the path to *grace, joy, and new life*.
And for that new life, all God's people can say together, Amen.