

Proper 18 C 2010
Text: Luke 14. 25-33

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

The text is written in of the 14th chapter of Luke

14:25 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.

The choice given in Deuteronomy our first reading from scriptures this morning is between following the commandments that lead to life and the disobeying and choosing death. The scribal writer of Deuteronomy is saying make your choice. Choose life or choose death. In our gospel reading from the gospel of Luke Jesus as calls upon those who make up the crowd that are following him on his way to the cross in Jerusalem the time for choosing to step out of the crowd is at hand. Choosing to step out of the crowd and follow the Jesus way is what makes one a disciple of Jesus and refusing to step out of the crowd keeps one from being a disciple. At the heart of this text from Luke is the hard choice to live life either as part of the crowd or that of walking the way of a disciple of Jesus. Jesus is saying there is a distinctive way to live the Jesus way of life.

Every since chapter 9 in Luke's gospel Jesus has been on his way to Jerusalem with one goal in mind to die upon the cross in the final confrontation with the powers of his day. On his

way to Jerusalem Jesus is being accompanied by crowds, disciples, and even apostles. When the writer says: **Now large crowds were traveling with him...** Those who are part of the crowd are those who have not yet made the choice to step out of the crowd and make the personal choice to follow Jesus as a disciple. One of the major issues of being a member of the crowd is the lack of a personal choice to step out from all the confused understandings of who Jesus is held by groups. Standing in the crowd thinking they know what Jesus is about would be those who had political agendas for Jesus that he would take aim against the ruling powers of Rome and restore the land of Palestine as a holy land. Others might have thought of Jesus as a wonder worker who could secure health and wealth for them. Some thought Jesus was a great rabbi of wisdom who could teach them secrets of God. All of these competing ideas held by those in the crowd of who Jesus is had one thing in common; they were reading Jesus wrong.

Is the modern day church member just a member of the crowd from Luke's perspective? Do we find ourselves reading Jesus wrongly? Do we need to re-listen to Jesus himself in order to hear Jesus invitation to let go of our confusing ideas about what we think Jesus; who we think Jesus is and let Jesus redefine himself for us by means of the cross. Do we need to be called to step out of the crowd of misconceptions of Jesus and his meaning and purpose into the Jesus' self described path of discipleship? Allowing Jesus to define himself in the new ways enables us to follow of him. It will take Jesus speaking to the crowd both ancient and modern to call those in the crowd to make the choice to let go of our preconceived ideas of Jesus is and to hear Jesus' invitation to follow him as a disciple.

Jesus sensing the misconceptions begins to whittle down the crowd to those who could be disciples when we are told in the text: **and he turned and said to them, "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. In one way Jesus is first saying to the crowd of would-be disciples: being a disciple of mine by stepping out of the crowd will cost ya. Being a disciple of Jesus is costly. The very first cost Jesus raises is the rupture of the most important relationships in the Mediterranean world the world of family relationships.

Knowing the context of the text those hearing Luke's gospel for the first time are gentile Christians living in urban areas who are embedded in the Roman patronage system attached to the hierarchies that exist in the households of that day and the extended family relationships of that day. The family in the Mediterranean was the source of ones' status, honor, identity, wealth, and power. This is why this saying is so striking when Luke uses the strongest word possible to characterize the shift in relationship required when one decides to follow Jesus on the Jesus path. Jesus in the gospel of Luke uses the word **hate**. Jesus trying to convey **the thought of loving less** of making a priority of the kingdom reign of God first and everything else following Jesus declares **Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother,..** Jesus is making the point that being a disciple is about making difficult choices to relativize every other relationship and every other thing as of lesser importance than our relationship with God. Jesus is trying to jolt us into that realization the Jesus way demands we let go of everything else in relationship to our relationship with God.

We get that realization that Jesus means everything because of what he goes on to say: **Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.** This notion of cross bearing is one of the most misapplied of all sayings. In our popular imaginations an illness that wears on us or living and dealing with difficult relationships that are exhaust us or having a less than fulfilling job or whatever painful difficulty we have had to face have is often been characterized as my cross to bear! In a means to help someone deal with these difficult situations

we have misapplied Jesus' intent. This helpful approach at dealing with difficult situations though washes out the meaning Jesus is wishing to give to cross bearing because then the cross becomes **something miserable that happens to us** instead of **being our chosen lifestyle as a disciple**. The cross is not inflicted upon us that makes us miserable but it is a lifestyle of choice and it becomes the way we look at all life. The cross becomes the interpretative lens for my whole life.

In Jesus day when some was carrying their cross on their shoulder there was only one destination; they were on their way to die. The call of the Jesus way or the way of the cross is the call to choose to let go. Let go of everything and anything we might cling to create our own life rafts that is not God's love and mercy. The Jesus way is all about the putting a way of all false solutions we create that are put in place to sustain us rather than being totally reliant to God's love as the basis for our life. Whether our false solutions for life is the creation of an attacking self, an isolated self, an accumulating self, or the dissolving self as a victim or abuse. Those of us with our more aggressive created life rafts we will always need to let go of our false solutions for the fixes of our lives that are not God first. For those of us that are more prone to disappearing as our false solution need to find the loving embrace of God's love in Jesus as the holding place of our identity. Whatever the end of the continuum we may find ourselves the letting go of our false solutions for life is at the heart of the Jesus path.

What Jesus is making clear in Luke's gospel with the addition of the two parables of first Jesus uses a construction image: **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?** Then Jesus uses a military image: **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? What's the point here? Jesus is saying before we choose; count the cost of the direction of our lives. In both descriptions the tower builder and the king have to figure if they can complete what they set out to do. They need to sit down and see the personal risks involved in making their choices to go forward. This is also true of one who wants to be a disciple of Jesus from the crowd as Jesus makes his way to Jerusalem to die on the cross.

Being a disciple in any age is costly because the Jesus path is about honing our ability to let go, let something die, let something be. It is about embracing the way of the cross. Jesus is making it clear that living this way in the world is a costly way. This is not the way of the crowd. It will never be the way of the crowd. To be a disciple of Jesus we have to be called out of the crowd to live in community with others who have been called out that what the church is as ekklesia- the ones callout. This call of Jesus to be a disciple relativizes all other commitments of family, our false expectations or ideas or understandings of God and Jesus. We step out of the crowd and follow Jesus on the path of discipleship as we hear Jesus address us in fresh ways while on the road carrying our cross that shows our willingness to let go. That is a costly decision.