

September 14, 2025

Luke 14:25-35:

## **“Count the Cost”**

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## **“Count the Cost”**

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,

In 2013, a designer and architect unveiled plans for a “Garden Bridge” over the River Thames in London. It was to be structurally striking, featuring nearly 300 trees, layered shrubs, ferns, grasses, and even saw-tooth balconies. It would serve as a beautiful, functional, and unique project, unlike anything the citizens of London had seen. The design garnered widespread attention, but the estimated cost quickly ballooned to more than \$270 million, significantly exceeding the original projections.

Despite the excitement for a project that promised to give Londoners a unique and beautiful space, criticism mounted over the rising expenses and the enormous annual maintenance it would require. By August 2017, the Garden Bridge Trust formally abandoned the project. In the end, about 71 million dollars (most of it public money) were spent. And the worst part? No part of the bridge was ever built. A project that began with grandeur ended in waste, because they had not counted the cost.

Today, we celebrate our annual “Rally Day,” a day of fun, food, fellowship, and time together. This day is intended to serve as a rallying point, calling us as a congregation to gather once again, recommit to regular Sunday School and Church attendance, and step into another season of teaching, worship, and service with the Church Holiday season on the horizon. But this day is meant to be more than that. It is a day of honest reflection on where our priorities lie in our Christian walk together and with the Lord. Just as the Garden Bridge project ended because no one truly counted the cost, Jesus warns that discipleship cannot be built on excitement alone. Following Him means reckoning with the cost, bearing the cross, and finding our life in Him.

### **I. How To “Count the Cost”**

This is exactly the kind of reflection that our Lord Jesus calls for in today's Gospel lesson. During His ministry, Jesus had amassed quite a following that was large enough to gain such attention from the religious leaders of the time. After a dinner with the Pharisees, their attempts to trap Jesus as a breaker of God's Law, and a sharp rebuke from our Lord regarding where their priorities were, Jesus turns to the crowds to preach and does not soften His message for them either. He turns to them and says these very strong words,

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.”

On first hearing, these words of Jesus can strike us as so stark that we almost want to reject them. Most of us love our parents, our spouses, our children, and our siblings dearly. To “hate” them sounds absurd. Not to mention hating our own lives! But we find relief in knowing that Jesus is not calling us to despise those closest to us. Rather, He is exposing our spiritual condition. Do we love God more than we love even His greatest gifts? By naming the very relationships and treasures most dear to us, Jesus uncovers a deep sin we all may struggle with, where we find ourselves trusting in the things which are given in this life, more than fixing our eyes and hearts on the one who has given them.

Part of counting the cost and bearing our crosses in this life is learning to see beyond the pull of the earthly, so that our hearts are fixed on what matters most. Scripture, from beginning to end, tells the account of God’s plan of salvation in Christ. Yet, how often do our lives get consumed by our schedules, deadlines, and endless to-do lists? These things, good in themselves, so easily tune out the eternal. We measure our worth by productivity, then we chase after rest and relaxation as if they were our highest good, and in the process, treat God and His Kingdom as something secondary. This is the danger Jesus unmask: that we would cling more tightly to the things of this world than to Him, and in doing so, fail to count the true cost of discipleship.

Counting the cost includes recognizing that following Jesus is not a hobby we take up for an hour or two on Sunday morning and set aside the rest of the week. It demands our whole life. But here is where we stumble: left to ourselves, we cannot measure rightly. Sometimes we overestimate, thinking our works or sacrifices are enough and turning them into a source of pride. Other times, we underestimate, treating the cross as nothing more than a good luck charm that excuses a life of complacency. Either way, we miss the mark. On our own, we never reckon the cost rightly, and with sin in the picture in this life, we never could.

## **II. The Cost Paid**

Paul writes in Ephesians 2,

“...remember that you were [once] separated from Christ, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He himself is our peace... So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.”

On our own, our calculations for what it would cost to follow the Lord Jesus end up being a penny compared to the real cost, which was nothing less than the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or spot. In His divine love for us, God took every necessary step to pay the perfectly calculated cost to ransom our souls from the clutches of sin, death, and the devil. Where we were willing to give nothing to repair what was broken in the Garden of Eden, God was willing to give everything, even the precious blood of His one and only Son. Only the most

loving, merciful, and gracious Lord would grant such an undeserved gift to us, who have often betrayed and turned away from Him for the things of His creation.

Consider someone stumbling on a pearl so valuable that it outshines every treasure they've ever owned. Jesus tells a parable about that very thing: a merchant who finds a pearl of great value and, in his joy, sells everything he has to buy it (Matthew 13:45–46). In the same way, the kingdom of God — Christ with all His gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation — is the one treasure of surpassing worth. Everything else pales beside it. This is what Jesus calls us to see: that nothing in this world, not even our dearest treasures, can compare with Him. To “count the cost” is to realize that everything else can be let go, because in Christ we already possess everything that matters.

The cost is now counted and paid with no strings attached. Sin has been defeated, and the victory over death has been won in Him. That means there is no cost that hangs over your head anymore, and there is nothing you can bring before God to appease Him because He is already appeased for Christ's sake. Therefore, we come to Him as beggars with empty hands ready to receive all He offers in Word and Sacrament and to offer all there is for us to offer: a broken and contrite heart to be renewed by Him, and a word and song of praise and thanks for all He has done.

For Christ's sake, you don't have to wake up each day wondering if you've done enough or fearing that God is waiting to tally your failures. In Christ, the ledger is wiped clean. The blood of Jesus doesn't just cover some of your sins, but all of them. The cross doesn't just pay part of the price, but the full price. The resurrection doesn't just hint at victory but proclaims it forever. By faith, you are free. And His work at the cross makes you free to live, free to serve, free to walk as a child of God without fear, because the cost has already been counted and paid in full by your Savior.

### **III. Rally Together Under the Cross**

Christ has secured everything for us, and that is why the writer to the Hebrews reminds us of what this means for life together in His Church. He writes,

“...since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus... let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith... Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

This is why we rally together. We do not rally simply for food, fun games, and ice cream—though that ice cream sure is delicious! We rally because in Christ Jesus our Lord, we are no longer strangers and aliens but fellow citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. We are members of His household, only by His precious blood. And so, we rally under the cross to lift one another up when the road grows long, to bear one another's burdens when sin weighs

heavily, to mourn together when life is broken, and to rejoice together in the forgiveness that flows from the cross and the empty tomb. We kneel before the Lord together, knowing that when we confess our faith, we are forgiven. We gather at His altar to taste and see the cost that has been paid, His body and blood given and shed for us. And we lift our voices together in songs of thanks, for Christ has not only counted the cost, but He has also conquered it, and given us a place in His kingdom.

The Garden Bridge in London was abandoned because no one truly counted the cost, and what was left was nothing but wasted money and broken promises. But the story of Christ and His Church could not be more different. Our Lord counted the cost of our salvation with perfect clarity. He saw the weight of our sin, the power of death, the grip of the devil, and He paid it all. And unlike the Garden Bridge, the cross of Christ is not an unfinished project. It stands complete. It is the foundation of our hope, the cornerstone of the Church, and the banner under which we now rally.

So, on this day, consider it not just an event where we share some laughs and food, but a reminder of what it truly means to belong to Christ's Church. Count the cost of what it took to save you and me from eternal separation from God. And then rejoice, because the One who paid it all now binds us together as His people. From here we go forward together as we are encouraged, forgiven, and set free, with confidence that the Lord who has secured everything for us will one day return for the final and eternal "Rally Day," when the whole Church on earth and in Heaven will gather as one around His throne in glory.

Amen.

Pastor Lucas Abbott