

*September 4, 2016*

*St. Luke 14:25-34: **"When Nothing Else Is More Important!"***

*Pilgrim Lutheran Church  
2155 North Oakland Avenue  
Decatur, Illinois 62526*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Luther once said: "A religion that gives nothing, costs nothing, and suffers nothing, is worth nothing." In our gospel lesson for this morning, "great multitudes" are following Jesus. If the objective was to fill the pews with warm bodies, Jesus succeeded. But, that is not his objective, though many in the modern church would adamantly maintain it is. Jesus is looking for disciples. Great multitudes do not impress him. And what is a disciple? In another place in Scripture we find Jesus speaking to Jews who had believed him, "*If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free (John 8:31-32).*"

To abide in Jesus' word is to be a disciple, to know the truth, and to be free. However, in our gospel lesson for this morning, there is another side to the coin of discipleship as Jesus gives himself to us. Abiding in him is a costly endeavor. It leads to suffering. The reason? Satan has spread his lies. This unbelieving world is enslaved to lies. And there is a remaining part of us that still loves sweet, little lies. But, the new creation that the Holy Spirit has wrought within us, by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, knows and embraces the great treasure that we have in Jesus. And so, when truth and lie meet, there is an awful battle the ensues. When righteousness meets unrighteousness, they don't mix. And when they don't mix, we are bid to embrace Jesus, and pray that all unrighteousness might be replaced with righteousness.

Christ illustrates this in these rather sharp words . . . he says, "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 (Luke 14:26)." The word that everyone will most likely zero in on is the word "hate." The use of the word might rattle us at first hearing because we are clearly taught in God's Word to value familial relationships and the life that has been given to us. In another place in Scripture Jesus even says, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust (Matthew 5:44-45)."

So, what does Jesus mean? A proper understanding of the word "hate" is demonstrated in a very earthly and understandable way in Genesis 29:30-31. There it says that "Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah . . . When the Lord saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren." Jacob loved both Rachel and Leah, *but he loved Rachel more than Leah*, and what he does not appreciate in Leah is what Jacob *hated*.

So, when Jesus says that we are to hate family and ourselves, he means that we are not to love family and ourselves more than him; that is, we are to fully love righteousness. We hate unrighteousness in family and in us, we refuse to embrace it, and we pray that all may be righteous in Jesus. It says in Ps. 101:3, "I will not set before my eyes anything that is worthless. I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling to me." And it says in Jude 20-23: "But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. And have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out

of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.” The well known Lutheran commentator R. C. H. Lenski writes in *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel*:

So the hate required for discipleship goes together with our love to our parents, etc., that love which understands any evil in them and would, with the help of Jesus remove it. Jesus is speaking of the father who is not a disciple, or, if he be a disciple, would in his blindness hinder his son in his discipleship. Even our natural affection for all our relatives and for our own life is left untouched by this hating, for our very love toward them will keep us from yielding to any desire of theirs which is in conflict with our discipleship.

Because we will not yield to any unrighteousness that would be in conflict with our discipleship, there is a price to pay - persecution and self-denial. There is a cross to bear when we do not go along with unrighteousness, whether it comes from within or without. And crucifixion is a painful thing. But the cross of Jesus has with it resurrection and victory. And it is here that one must carefully consider what is really at stake. Matthew Henry writes, “Satan shows the best, but hides the worst, because his best will not countervail his worst; but Christ's will abundantly.”

We would do well to ponder those words. Jesus seeks disciples with an undivided heart. The worst of it is this: to bear the cross entails a lot of strife down here with others and ourselves. But the end of the matter? All of it will give way to forever glory and inexpressible joy. We know it to be true, for our Savior “was crucified, died, and was buried, but he descended into hell, the third day he rose from the grave, ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, and from thence he will judge the living and the dead.” As a disciple, we follow in our master's footsteps, and what we see in him has been given to us.

Our Lord says, “So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:33).” Here we are brought to the demands of discipleship - **When Nothing Else Is More Important!** One must be willing to relinquish that which is most precious if it interferes with an intimate communion with the Lord Jesus Christ. One must be willing to part with that which he hates and chase after Jesus to the very end.

One day, a young disciple of Christ visited the home of an elderly Christian. He had heard that this old man was a true disciple who had not lost his first love. The old man was sitting on the porch with his dog enjoying a beautiful sunset. The young man sat down beside him and asked: “Why is it that so many Christians zealously chase after God in the beginning, but then become lazy and finally give up? I have been told that you have fervently sought after God throughout your many years. People see something in you that they don't see in most. What makes you different?”

The old man smiled and replied, “Let me tell you a story: One day I was sitting here quietly in the sun with my dog. Suddenly a large white rabbit ran across the yard in front of us. Well, my dog jumped up, and took off after that big rabbit with a passion. Soon, other dogs joined him, attracted by his barking. The dogs ran across the creeks, up stony embankments and through thickets and thorns! Gradually,

however, one by one, the other dogs dropped out of the pursuit, discouraged by the course and frustrated by the chase. Only my dog continued to hotly pursue the white rabbit. In that story, young man, is the answer to your question.”

The young man sat in confused silence. Finally, he said, “I don’t understand. What is the connection between the rabbit chase and the quest for God?” “You fail to understand,” answered the old man, “because you failed to ask the obvious question: why didn’t the other dogs continue on the chase? And the answer to that question is that they had not seen the rabbit. Unless you know for certain that there is a rabbit to be caught, the chase is just too difficult. You will lack the passion and determination necessary to keep up the chase.”

So, have you seen the rabbit? Have you seen Jesus through the words he speaks? Do you see through the eyes of faith? For the joy set before you are you willing to endure the cross, scorning its shame? In the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation that he has earned for you in his sufferings and death are you willing to chase him across creeks, up stony embankments and through thickets and thorns? Again, the words of Luther: “A religion that gives nothing, costs nothing, and suffers nothing, is worth nothing.” In Jesus, who is our everything, who redeemed us with his blood, who suffered for our sin, and became our priceless treasure . . . in Jesus, nothing else is more important.

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott