

Trinity 12 2022
Luke 14: 25 – 35
The Cost of Discipleship

The passage we have heard read from Luke's Gospel does not make for comfortable reading. We know that Jesus is travelling towards Jerusalem, heading for certain death, preparing to be crucified. Luke does not give us a geographical location, but it is thought that He might be travelling through an area called Perea, where as far as we know, he had not been before. Large crowds are following Him. They will have heard many things about Him, and no doubt want to see for themselves what all the fuss is about. These are clearly not His close disciples and usual followers, who will already have been taught many things about the cost of following Him. He turns to the crowds and starts to really lay it on the line. Whoever comes to me and does not hate, father and mother, wife and children, brothers, and sisters and even their own life cannot be my disciple. Now that doesn't sound right, does it? Didn't Jesus tell us that we must love everyone, even our enemies? Didn't Jesus tell us that we must love others as we love ourselves? How then does it make any sense that we must hate our families. Well, the answer is twofold, firstly that the word He uses which we have translated as hate actually means to turn away from, and the expression Jesus is using is a Jewish expression meaning to prefer or to love more than. So what Jesus is saying is that if you want to be my disciple you have to love me more than even your mother, father, wife, children, brothers and sisters and be prepared to put me first. He is saying that being a follower of Jesus, could cost you everything.

In 21st century Britain, the expression, a cross I have to bear, means a burden that we carry, something hard in our lives, it could be a physical difficulty or a difficult person. In 1st century Palestine to carry your cross meant to go to your death. Jesus was not messing around here – He was saying if you want to

Trinity 12 2022
Luke 14: 25 – 35
The Cost of Discipleship

follow me you have to understand that I am going to die, and you have to be prepared to die as well. Now we might spiritualise this and talk about dying to self, dying to selfishness and hopefully for us that is all that it will mean. But many of our brothers and sisters in Christ in other parts of the world are still quite literally following Jesus to their death. Jesus goes on to tell two parables about counting the cost of what we do with our lives. The parable of the counting how much it will cost to build a tower before you start in case you lay the foundation and cannot complete it and are then laid open to ridicule may well be a dig at the deceased Herod the great, who attempted to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem as a vanity project, and his sons who took it on after him. They came nowhere near recreating the 1st temple built by Solomon and they ran out of money before the temple ever finished.

Jesus goes on to say that no-one can be His disciple if they don't give up all their possessions. Again, this isn't necessarily literal, Jesus's ministry was supported financially by women of means and He stayed with friends such as Martha and Lazarus who had their own houses. Not all Christians are called to poverty. Although we are all called to give generously. The point yet again, is what is most important to you, your family, and your possessions or Jesus. Are we prepared, honestly and truly to put Him first.

He put us first. God put us first when He sent Jesus to live amongst us and to die on the Cross for us. Are we really prepared to pay the price of discipleship? Or do we want what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called cheap grace. Bonhoeffer was born in Germany in 1906 but as an adult had gone to America to study. He chose to leave the safety of the US to return to Germany to publicly speak out against the Nazis, this led to his arrest in 1943 and his being hanged in 1945.

Trinity 12 2022
Luke 14: 25 – 35
The Cost of Discipleship

Now we talk a lot about God's love and grace. We believe that because God loves us, we are saved by grace, not by anything that we can do – we cannot earn our salvation by doing good works or being a good person, only by believing in Jesus and His death and resurrection. That is all true. We are loved and Salvation is freely given. However, as Jesus and Bonhoeffer tell us, salvation is free, but discipleship is costly. And Bonhoeffer warns us against cheap grace. This is from the first chapter of his famous book, *The Cost of Discipleship*:

Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession.... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man' will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble, it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him.

Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock. 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. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son: "ye were bought at a price," and what has cost God

Trinity 12 2022
Luke 14: 25 – 35
The Cost of Discipleship

much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life but delivered him up for us. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God.

As I said God sent Jesus and Jesus put us first and gave up everything for us. Are we prepared to give up everything to follow Him? Now I can't even begin to unpack all that that means in one short sermon. It can take a lifetime to learn how to be a true disciple. There are two questions that we have to ask ourselves though. Do we want to be true disciples, and are we prepared to count the cost, to work out what it truly means for us as individuals, and us as the family of God in this place, to be followers of Jesus. Or are we willing to settle for cheap grace, that wants forgiveness without repentance, absolution without true confession, grace without discipline or discipleship, grace that allows us to just continue as we are without requiring anything significant from us?

Let's just think about that for a moment. Are we serious about following Jesus about learning to be true disciples and counting the cost of discipleship, not just once but continually, so that we can know His perfect will in our lives. And then I would like to pray for us.