**Count the Cost...and Repent**

Based on [Luke 14:25-35](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Lk14.25-35)

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Pastor Nathan Fuehrer

The central teaching of Jesus in gospel lesson today is repentance. Anyone who would presume to follow Jesus must “count the cost” that is take inventory of their natural ability and realize they don’t have the stock to what it takes. **Mankind has lost its saltiness, and cannot restore it.** This is not to turn away his would-be disciples, but to make them distrust their own righteousness, deny themselves, and instead turn to and trust Him…who by his blood justifies them, declares them righteous before God, and gives them the Holy Spirit who gives them not just the instruction, but the will and the desire to be his true disciple.

In today's gospel lesson, we hear of great crowds accompanying Jesus. This is a period in his ministry where he is still pretty popular with the crowds. He has moved from Obscurity—(People saying, “*Who is this man who does such wonderful signs?*”)--to stardom and celebrity and popularity. They know what he has done to heal and to save and to teach the kingdom and they like it. **And so what does he do? Does he use his popularity to further ingratiate himself with more people? Did Jesus think making himself popular was the goal of his ministry?**

Jesus doesn't want popularity. We know this, because at a certain point in his ministry He begins to teach things that will make him unpopular. **He teaches three things today, hard things, impossible things that would be sure to shake any straddlers off the fence and shrink his church.** These are not new things in Jesus' teaching, but he starts laying them on thick, listing three hard teachings at once and in succession. These crowds are wannabe disciples,...and rather than simply affirm them, Jesus teaches them the "cost of true discipleship." In short, Jesus says that being his disciple doesn't just mean giving him a thumbs up and liking his facebook page. To be his disciple you need to be ready to (1) hate your family, (2) suffer all things, and (3) give up everything that's valuable to you.

There it is. Do you want to be a disciple of Jesus?...He lays it out right there. Renounce *everything* in this earthly realm...your family and yourself...your happiness and your personal property...that's everything.

How's that for a church discipleship program? "**Do you love your family and believe in yourself? Do you hate to suffer? Do you save money and buy things to make your life easier and more convenient?...Then our church is not for you. Then discipleship here is not for you. Then following Jesus is not for you.”**

What Jesus teaches in this lesson about true discipleship, is also what any true Christian and Apostolic Church will teach today. Rather than simply affirm everyone who comes through the doors, the church should be like Jesus and not hide the cost of discipleship for the sake of gaining exposure with the world. The church should not seek popularity. The church should teach plainly as Jesus did saying, “**If you would rather put family first; avoid suffering at all costs, and give only a fraction of what you have away rather than everything...honestly you'll have better luck up the road.** There you’ll no doubt be able to find a church that says you're following Jesus just fine if you give only 10 percent to God; or that when you ignore your family’s sin for the sake of peace and love then you are putting Jesus first; // **or that you’re really living out Jesus command to give up your possessions when you volunteer for some charity work every now and then, even while keeping the bulk of your worship invested in the world."**

All this to say, folks, that no one born of the flesh and sold under sin has the natural capital for discipleship. No one. If you honestly count the cost of discipleship, you would find that nobody, save those who have been given the gift of 100% repentance and poverty of spirit ***wants*** to follow Jesus, no matter how much they sing love songs about "**giving themselves" to him.** They might want to be "in his loving arms"...so long as he's off of the cross and on a couch, next to their children, warm and safe and clean at least 90% of the time.

Have you ever taken a discipleship program? Do they mention any of these things? Renouncing everything...family, personal happiness and private property? No, what a discipleship program does is soften discipleship, or redefine it into something easier than what Jesus says here. "**Hate your family**" means, "**Bother them until they come to church.**" "**Take up your cross**" means, "**Don't be afraid to say stupid and corny things for Jesus.**" "**Give up all you have**" means "**Be sure to give your required ten percent, then you're a good steward.**" They will mention these words of Jesus and show you just how much he’s asking, and then ask less of you than Jesus does. That’s not a recipe for discipleship, it’s a recipe for hypocrisy.

Ironically, modern churches try to teach people how to follow Jesus by loving their family, by avoiding stress, by giving away some stuff while still keeping most your stuff. They do not teach total repentance, because it’s a hard and narrow way only a few will enter. If you teach total repentance you will have few church members and won’t be able to pay the bills. So they widen by following a set of "doable" principles, "pointers" that will indicate your "special level of discipleship." That's modern popular christianity folks, and it's the new monasticism...requiring less that total repentance so that people who want to have Christ and a mistress, Christ and pornography, Christ and a low view of the bible, Christ and false doctrine, can feel comfortable in the pews on Sunday and contribute to the coffers. But it’s not all about money. Churches feel good about themselves because they actually think there doing people a favor by lowering the bar of total repentance. They think they are saving them, when really they are telling them they can serve two masters and still enter eternal life. It’s a lie. This emporer has no clothes but who will say so?

The Confessional Lutheran Church is uniquely equipped to say so, because it is the only church that has 100% pure doctrine. I know it might offend some for me to say so, but it’s true and needs to be said for the good of the world. Ladies and Gentlemen, you need to remember what it means to be a Lutheran. "Lutheran" is not just a brand name within Christianity, like Nike or Reebok. Confessional Lutheran doctrine is the honest face of Christianity, because it sees that what is central to the Christian faith is the doctrine of justification. And what keeps justification central, and keeps disciples from swerving off to the right or to the left, is to understand in God’s word the proper distinction between Law and Gospel.

The Law is what God really expects of you...."Do This...Don't do that!" And when you face the Law...you realize just how far from the kingdom you really are. And once the Law has made you face that fact...that you are a poor miserable sinner...that is the first blessing. Because finally when you see your ugliness, the places where you have kept things back from Jesus, you won't want to look at yourself anymore. **So you turn away from the mirror and your vanity and lo, someone is standing there.** If you can tear your eyes away from yourself even for one second, then maybe you can see Jesus. The Law makes you look at yourself, and if your honest, and unless you got your beer goggles on...you'll realize that you are not saveable. The Gospel has you get off of yourself and look at Jesus who says, "Fear not, though you are unsaveable...I have saved you."

Jesus is preaching the Law here. Do you really think you are able to hate, that is, renounce your family to follow Jesus? Are you capable of living a life of constant suffering and persecution? Are you strong enough to surrender all your saving and possessions and live only on the safety net of faith. If so, then why haven't you? If so, then you have a pretty high opinion of yourself. If so, then you have no ears to hear the gospel because you don't need it. If you can do it yourself, then you don't need Jesus, because you are him...and you might as well stay at home on Sunday and worship yourself. If you really think you are able to keep the first commandment...that is truly fear, love and trust in God above everything...then you are a Pharisee, **who believes in your own righteousness and your own ability to save, and--according to your own heart--you really have no need of a saviour**.

Here it is ladies and gentlemen, Jesus is telling you that you need to be ready to hate your family, suffer all things and have nothing in order to save yourself...why?...**precisely to make you give up on saving yourself.** God led the Israelites to the Red Sea, and as Pharaoh's army was upon them on one side a vast sea on the other, and they could see that they were trapped **and that it was impossible for them to survive**. So too, Jesus tells you these things to make you see that salvation is impossible. And when you see that salvation is impossible, Jesus words of Law and Gospel finally reach you..."**yes with man it is impossible, but not with God, for whom all things are possible."** And **then** Moses lifts his staff parts the Red Sea, **then** Jesus lifts his arms on the cross and parts you from your sin...**then** God does the impossible to save his unsavable people.

Jesus says in the gospel, "**How many of you, desiring to build a something, doesn't matter what it is, a house, a garage, a backyard shed, does not first sit down and count the pennies to make sure you have enough pennies to finish the building. Cause if you don't, you're gonna start, you're gonna lay the foundation and it's not gonna get finished and everyone's gonna laugh at you. What king is going to go out against an army twice his size?...nobody's gonna do that. Well friends, look at the army of sin, death, and the devil that has gathered against you. Are you able to overcome it?**” ///

Here, every Sunday, in this Lutheran Church, you count the cost of building your own tower to heaven. You do a personal inventory to see whether you have enough of what it takes to complete the "**project of salvation**." You contemplate going to war with sin, death, and the devil and you count the cost. **You add up whether you have the force to fight the devil, or whether you'll have to make a deal with him.** You consider your sinful condition and count the cost as to whether you can follow Jesus to the cross, and you freely admit..."**No I do not have what it takes, for I am by nature sinful and unclean**."

Every Lord's Day, you come together with other incapable disciples and freely admit, "**Lord God, I am a poor miserable sinner**." **It's not just that I'm not perfect, or that I make good intentioned mistakes. It's that my heart is turned inward so that even when I begin to follow you, I end up following myself."** You say, "**Almighty God, merciful Father, I have counted the cost, and I know that if I have to go to war with the devil I will lose. If I have to build my own tower to heaven I won't be able to finish, and I will be mocked."** This is why we are taught to pray to God, “Lead us not into temptation.” In other words, “Lord, I cannot by my own power resist temptation.” “Don’t trust me with it…rather deliver me from it.”

Ladies and Gentlemen, you count the cost and you repent. You confess that you don't have what it takes to follow Jesus to the cross, and you throw yourself upon the mercy of God. and say, "**Please forgive me, a sinner. Have mercy on me. I cannot follow Jesus. I don't have what it takes.**"

And finally, when you are helplessly caught between Pharaoh's army and the Red Sea...when you finally see that you are truly unforgivable incapable of true discipleship, that's when true repentance is given to you. And Jesus says, "**Arise, take your mat and go for I have forgiven your sin.**" Jesus says, "W**ith you salvation is impossible; but with God all things are possible. // I did it, for you. I counted the cost of building a tower to heaven and you know what?...I paid it.** I thought through what it takes to engage in war with the devil--the prince of this world who has twice the soldiers I do--and I didn't have to bargain for peace. **I measured it, and I won it without compromise or diplomacy with the devil**. **Sure, I was mocked--on the cross...by onlookers saying,** "**He would save others but he cannot save himself**." But on Easter morning I had the last laugh. Cause that's when I stormed Satan's castle and preached victory to and over the spirits in hell, and rose again preaching peace to my disciples on earth.

And now, even today Jesus says to you, "**I have established peace on earth, not for those who give a relatively large percentage of themselves to my cause; but for those pathetic disciples who have counted the cost and realize they cannot build their own salvation**." They are the widow who put in not a percentage all that she had. That’s true repentance. Tell me, which of his disciples did not run from the cross? And yet, which of his disciples did he not save by it? Only Judas, who tried to buy back his own salvation by returning the thirty pieces of bloody silver, but still keeping for himself the rest that he stole from the disciples treasury. Peter was forgiven for his complete breakdown in tears.

You were created to be salt, yet through Adam you have lost your saltiness. So Jesus asks you, how will you gain your saltiness again? How will you become worthy enough to be kept around and not thrown out? By being seasoned with righteousness. And what does that consist of? // You are seasoned with righteousness when you are seasoned with Jesus. And you are seasoned with Jesus by ***receiving* him...in word and body and blood and baptism *through* faith, with nothing of your own to offer**. That's how you are sure God has blessed you and saved you…that is how you receive salvation and are assuredly his disciple.

And so you have received Jesus...!? Does that mean you are now set free to worship your family, dodge suffering and gather hordes of possessions for yourself? Of course not. But it does mean that you have nothing to boast in, nothing, except the cross of Christ. It does mean that when you look at your health, wealth and relationships you will finally see how shallow they really are compared to the surpassing worth of knowing Christ. **For when you see with your own heart the depth of the love of God, it won’t be that difficult to *count the cost* of giving up your precious things, because you will see they have no value anyway.**..no value, that is, apart from the Lord and King who went to war for you and won! You won’t have to count the cost because you will then know in your heart the treasures in heaven that await you. Because this declaration that because of Christ you are righteous before God is not just some nice sounding fiction. God declares you righteous for Jesus sake and at that moment you are given the Holy Spirit, who converts you wants and desires to conform to the image of Christ. You still struggle, it’s not like you’ll enjoy it if you lose your house or your family in this life; but to bear such losses and crosses as God sends your way, is of greater honour and glory than all temporary peace and possessions this world has to offer. You know you cannot keep the law perfectly; but you also know that because of the Spirit in you you can actually keep the law…not some softened version of it. For you have Christ, he has called you and made you his disciple. You sins are forgiven, you are holy. You have been given the Holy Spirit who equips you for every good work you are called in His Name to do. He who has ears let him hear the gospel!