

Sermon Notes – September 4, 2022

(Luke 14:25-33)

Have you ever committed to do something and yet you knew you weren't going to do it, or you were only going to do it if it was convenient or you had enough time? Or have you ever been pulled into doing something -- it looked good and it sounded good and you were all excited with the people doing it, but you just didn't get around to it? In our gospel lesson today, Jesus had a crowd following him and he knew they were superficial in following him. **They didn't quite understand the costs and the demands of following Jesus Christ.**

Jesus picked something to talk about that meant a lot to them - and that was family. Do you really think that Jesus told us to hate our family? No, he didn't want you to hate your family. Now there are some people in life who do hate their mom and dad maybe because of addiction or abuse or neglect, but most of us who grew up in a good family and had family who loved us, would be awfully hard to tell us to hate our family, wouldn't it? ***Jesus wasn't speaking literally -- he was using the language of exaggeration to get across a point and make an emphasis.*** He was using what is called "hyperbole" - the language of exaggeration to get across his point. For example, if I said, "You know I'm so hungry that I could eat a horse." Well guess what? ... I'm emphasizing that I'm hungry, but I can't eat a horse... can you? Or how about... have you ever said to somebody, "that cost me an arm and a leg"? Well, we meant that it was real expensive, but I didn't really lose my arm or my leg; we are trying to emphasize something. Jesus was using exaggeration to get across a point. Jesus knew that the Jews valued family. In fact, it was a paternal society - the father was in charge - and so your behavior (as a child) reflected on your family. What you did, where you lived, and who you married was all determined by family. So, family was important to them and Jesus knew that. He knew he would get their attention. He wanted them to think about following him and what that meant. And he implies, "You need to put me and your relationship to me first in your life." You belong to something bigger than your own biological family - you belong to the family of God. Now, he's not saying that our family is not important. He's not literally saying, "to hate your family." Think

about how in the Bible it says, “Honor your father and mother;” think about how the children who were brought to Jesus by their mothers, and the parents wanted Jesus to bless them. The disciples wanted to push them away, but Jesus said, “Forbid not the little children to come unto me.” Jesus loved people and he loved families. Jesus wasn’t literally saying to hate your family – ***he’s saying that you and I belong to something bigger than just our own biological family and our stuff and our possessions and all that.***

When you commit to him, you’re committing to him first, and then your family and others and all that other stuff comes underneath. If you have a growing relationship with God, it’s going to cause you to love your family even more – not put them down and hate them. Jesus used it to make a point – to make the people think about the demands and the cost of being a disciple. Jesus gives us two perfect examples. He says, “If a king were going against his opponent, would he not look at his number of soldiers, the size of his army, how much equipment, how many tools he had, and all that kind of stuff to see if he could go against that opponent?” If not, he’d go out and send an army of peace-treaters. So, if you build a tower, aren’t you going to sit down and think about how much money you need for supplies, for helpers, for equipment, and tools before you build? Otherwise, if you just get half-way through the project of building, everybody’s going to make fun of you -- you’re going to be embarrassed and humiliated.

Jesus said, “I want you to think about being a Christian. I want you to think it out.” You see, sometimes we make a lot of our decisions on our emotions and our feelings, and these people in the parade that day were carried away by their feelings. Jesus was a popular speaker and preacher and teacher; he had been healing people. There were people in the crowd that wanted to be healed; there were people who were curious and just wanted to see him heal somebody. **Jesus knew they didn’t understand all that he was expecting of them – the demands and the cost of being a follower of Jesus.** Jesus knew that he was going to die and be betrayed. He knew that some of his disciples would be beheaded; they would be crucified; they would be tortured, humiliated, and imprisoned. Now in our day, we may not die for our faith. Do you know that there are

people still in certain parts of the world who die for the Christian faith and if they're baptized, the government will have them killed? Nepal is one of those places. Years ago, when Andy and Ellen Collins were missionaries there, they told us that people who were baptized in the faith had to be baptized at night, and if they got caught, they would be imprisoned for seven years - and some were even killed. So in some places in the world, people are still killed for being Christian. But, most of us in America don't have to deal with that. **But we all as Christians must consider the demands and costs of following Jesus.**

Think about some of the things that Jesus demands from me and you: "Love your enemies; pray for those who persecute you; do good to those who mock you, hate you, and revile you." That's not natural for us. We can only do these things with the help of God's Holy Spirit at work in us and that relationship with him. And, he's saying, "This is what I am asking of you - to love your enemies, love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength - love your neighbor as yourself." Most of us are about self-promotion rather than loving others. Jesus, in essence, is saying, "There are some demands and some costs - it won't be easy." You see it may be the cost of our time and our talents; it may be that God asks us to do something for somebody that we don't want to do - it's not a convenient time. We want to be with our family and do something with them right then rather than helping that person that is standing right in front of us that needs somebody immediately. Jesus may ask us to give of our time and talents. He may ask us to share of our financial resources with somebody in need. I'm so amazed at our Lahu Pastor, Jaha and his wife, Ekong Seechang. He and his wife have taken in people to live in their home. They help feed them, teach them English, help them apply for jobs, and help get their kids in school. Their oldest son and his wife have taken in a Lahu family to help them get acclimated to the United States. I am amazed at all they do for others.

Sometimes God may ask us to make some sacrifices. Sometimes it may cause conflict within our family. Let me give you an example of that - Dr. Will Willimon was the Chaplain at Duke University many years ago. When he was the Pastor and Chaplain there, he said an irate angry parent called him up one day and he said, "Dr. Willimon, I hold you totally

responsible for my daughter's actions. She's going to Haiti to do mission work. I've spent gobs of money for my daughter to get a BS degree in Mechanical Engineering and now she's going to Haiti as a trained engineer to dig ditches for the poor and to do whatever else. I can't believe it! I blame you for it!" Dr. Willimon said, "Wait just a minute, buster. What did I do?" He said, "Well, you're the one that taught her religion classes. She was influenced by you. You impressed her and you spoke to her." Dr. Willimon asked, "Aren't you her dad? Didn't you take her to Sunday School and Worship where she heard all the Bible stories about loving Jesus and serving others? Aren't you the one that let her go to youth group and on youth mission trips to serve the poor?" He said, "Yes, I know. But I didn't want her to be a minister. I just wanted her to be a good Presbyterian." Sometimes family can have conflict with us going into the ministry.

When I was first going into the ministry, my brothers didn't accept it too well. I'll never forget that one of my brothers said, "Well why couldn't you just go to work in the mill or be a secretary or a nurse?" I said, "I didn't want to do any of that." He said, "Well why don't you just go sign-up for the Army and you can get your education paid for you." I thought, "Yeah. The Vietnam war is going on. What am I going to do - be a secretary or a nurse in Vietnam?" I didn't want to do any of that. I think I told you before - that for five years after I got out of Seminary and started working for a church, my brother asked me, "Well, when are you going to get out and get a real job?" He just didn't know what ministry involved. Sometimes, family expectations and God's call for our lives can come into conflict.

Jesus knew that sometimes we can be pulled by the world and its ways away from our love for God. In those days, Jesus used the example of family because it was so important to them. It's important to us today and he's not saying to hate your family. But, Jesus is saying that you need to put a priority on your relationship to God and then family, and others. You will love your family even more if you have a growing, loving relationship with God because God loves people and family and children. God's not against our families. He just wants us to put our ultimate loyalty in him and he knew that would affect our attitudes, our actions,

our relationships, our lifestyle. He's calling us to a commitment to him - a day-by-day commitment.

If we just base following Jesus on our feelings and our emotions, when the trials, adversity, and temptations come, it's so easy to go with what we feel. How many of us feel like going to work or school every day? I bet there are somedays when we get up and go, "Lord, do I have to go there again today?" Some days we don't want to go to school or work because we don't feel like it. ***God wants us to have a commitment to him and place a priority on our relationship with him. It will affect our attitudes, our actions, our relationships, our family, and everything about us.***

Jesus was saying to them and to us, "I'm asking you to take this seriously. Don't be superficial. Don't just do it when you feel like it." Sometimes I think being a Christian in the United States can be too easy for us -- "I go to church when I want. I pray when I need to, and I read the Bible when I feel the mood or when I need it." God says, "I want you to seriously think about what it means to follow me - the demands and the costs. I want you to have a relationship with me - a day-by-day commitment to live for me and serve me. There's some sacrifices that you'll have to make, but I'll be with you.

As you grow in that relationship with Jesus, you will be salt." As he goes on through the gospel lesson, he says, "Salt, if it's lost its saltiness, is not good - and it's good for nothing but to throw it out." In those days salt came from the Dead Sea and it was often mixed with other substances. It's not like our salt. The salt, if stayed out too long, would lose its saltiness and it wasn't good - not even to fertilize the soil or to flavor food or to preserve meat. Jesus says, "You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world." You and I are to flavor the world - to make it better. We are to preserve what's good in the world. We are to fertilize and plant seeds for others so they want to know Christ and see him in us.

In conclusion -- Jesus says, "Are you willing to be serious rather than superficial? Are you willing to think before you leap - think before you act - think about what I'm asking you? There's a cost, and some

demands.” May we think about our commitment to God and may the Holy Spirit help us to live it out. Amen.