

“The Cost of Following Jesus”

Date: September 14, 2014

Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: Luke 9:57-62

Theme: Commitment, discipleship

Occasion: New members joining

A funny story to begin our time together. If you’ve heard it before, just smile and don’t give away the punch line. You see, there once was a pig and a chicken walking along a road. They pass a church and this gets the chicken to start thinking.

Says the chicken to the pig, “You know, over the years that United Methodist Church has been pretty good to us. I think we ought to do something nice for them. What do you think?”

“Good idea,” says the pig. “What do you have in mind?” The chicken thinks for a moment and says, “I think we ought to give them a banquet.” “I’m all for that,” says the pig. “What shall we serve them?”

“How about bacon and eggs?” asks the chicken. “Not on your life!” replies the pig. “For you that’s just a donation. But for me, it’s a total commitment.”

That, my friends, is what the gospel is all about, this morning. Jesus is asking those who follow Him not just to make a casual donation, but to make a total commitment. Three people come to Jesus wanting to be one of his followers. Jesus is quite honest in telling them that if they do, it will come at a high price.

At the beginning of our lesson, we learn that Jesus is headed towards Jerusalem. He was determined to go there, even though many people were trying to talk him out of it. They thought it would be too dangerous. In fact, Jesus already knew that if He persisted in going, there would be a cross and crucifixion waiting for Him.

And yet, He was determined to be obedient to God, even if it meant great personal sacrifice. So he doesn't mince words with these folks who tell him they want to be his followers. To the first of the would-be-disciples Jesus says, in essence, "Count the cost."

He tells the man, "Listen, I don't always have a place to sleep at night. Are you willing to make the kind of sacrifices that are necessary to be my disciple? Count the cost before you decide to follow me." Here's the take-away: Jesus never invited anyone to follow him using false advertising. There is a great cost to being a Christian.

We may have done the world a great dis-service, by allowing people to join the church without telling them that a great deal is expected of them. People join the church thinking it doesn't make all that much difference in their lives. And it should make all the difference in the world.

If we choose to follow Jesus, He tells us to be ready to make sacrifices. We should be ready to give till it hurts, and to be willing to give not only our treasure, but also our time and talents. Jesus tells us to share the pain and the problems of others, even if their pain makes us uncomfortable.

No *maybe's* about it, there is a price to pay for being a Christian. Anyone who tells you that it's an easy thing to be a Christian hasn't told you the whole truth. When we decide to be a Christian, it's not a game. We don't play games with God. When we say "Yes" to Jesus Christ, it is costly.

A second person tells Jesus he wants to follow, but first he wants permission to go and bury his father. Jesus tells the man, "Let the dead bury their own dead." Now, at first Jesus sounds cruel. It

sounds like he's saying, "don't even go to your parent's funeral." That sounds pretty heart-less.

But Jesus often used extreme statements to get people's attention. He was a good teacher that way. What he's saying here is that there is a higher loyalty than even loyalty to one's family. He's saying, "If you want to be my disciple, then your loyalty to me must be even greater than to your family."

Wow! That's hard to hear. But you see, the contrast that Jesus is making is not between the best and the worst that people have to choose from. Instead, the contrast is between the best and the highest loyalties that a person could choose.

"If you want to be my disciple," says Jesus, "then I want all of you. Not just part of who you are. I want to come before everything else in your life; before your job, before your family, before patriotism to your country. I want to be first in your life."

Jesus knows we have other commitments, even commitments that are important and worthwhile. But God and the kingdom must come before all of them. Sometimes that creates tension – between what God expects and what family expects.

There may be tension between what patriotism asks of us, and what God demands of us. There may be a tension between what our job requires and what God requires. And we must choose. Discipleship, following Jesus, is costly.

A third man comes to Jesus wanting to follow Him. But first he wants to go home and say goodbye to his family. Again, Jesus seems rather hard and uncharitable. "No," he says, "You can't go back. You

must keep your attention on the present moment and not go back to the past.”

Jesus is not anti-family, as he might appear to be. Instead, Jesus is saying that the kingdom of God requires our undivided attention. He uses the phrase, “You can’t plow a field by looking back over your shoulder.”

Maybe today, since most of us don’t plow fields, he might have said, “You can’t mow the front yard in a straight line, if you keep looking back over your shoulder.” Even so, what’s the point?

Pay attention to what you’re doing. Don’t be so distracted by other things that God gets pushed to the sidelines of your life. There are many things in life that cry out for our attention. Many of them deserve our time and energy.

But, we are limited human beings and we can’t do everything. We have to pick and choose. Jesus is telling us to keep God the priority of our lives. Keep Jesus as the focal point.

Don’t be so distracted during the day that you forget who you are, and whose you are. You are a child of God, beloved and precious, called to embody the heart of God in all that you think, or say or do.

Jesus made the total commitment, giving his life for the ransom of human sinners. We may or may not be asked to give our life for the Lord. But let us not take lightly our Christian discipleship. The kind of commitment that God expects of us is nothing less than all we have and all we are. Don’t be like the chicken, making a token gift of yourself. Let’s all be hams, and give it all for the kingdom. Amen?