

## Luke 14:25-33

Last month when we were together my siblings commented on something I've thought about for a very long time: We are so lucky we get along so well. So many of the people we know, our friends, even our cousins, actually dislike their family members so deeply that it could be considered hate. Now it would seem that Jesus is giving them the ok to do so... but is that what Jesus is really saying?

Jesus has just eaten at a wealthy man's home where he told the host he had invited the wrong people because the people there were expected to repay the host by asking him to their home. Jesus told him he should have invited people who couldn't possibly repay what they had received. This visit gained him a huge number of followers who were hanging on to hear what he had to say, to see what he was going to do. Perhaps they thought since he said the lower people of society were to be treated to the religious leader's hospitality Jesus was going to give them free handouts and protect them from those who would do them harm.

Jesus realized that so many people were following him with the wrong impression of who he was and what it meant to follow him. So he told them they would have to hate their mother and father and sister and brother and wife and children, even hate life itself to be fit to follow him. I imagine that was a shock, even though the word "hate" Jesus used did not mean what we think it meant. We think hate is to, well, you know, hate. But the actual word Jesus used meant something that we don't have a word for, it means to have a lower allegiance to something.... In other words, you have to love Jesus more than you love anything else in life, including your own life. To follow Jesus means that you are committed to him even to the point of your own death. That's what Jesus meant when he said, "Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me is not my disciple."

We try to put that statement into our cultural context... "I have to live with this problem because it's my cross to carry." Perhaps someone takes it to mean they have to live with a genetic defect because it is their cross to carry. Or perhaps another person takes it to mean they have to take on an additional burden in their life because it's their cross to carry. Guess what? That isn't what Jesus meant at all, and the people who were following him at that point in time would never have considered it to be such.

We have glamorized the cross. We see diamond studded crosses on performers whose songs definitely are not Christian. We see beautiful cross necklaces, earrings, even bracelets and decorations on women's purses. When I was in a sociology class at Edinboro the professor asked one young gentleman the reason for wearing the cross around his neck. The student couldn't answer him. Most of us realize it is a symbol for Jesus, but we are post resurrection, Easter people. The people who were with Jesus at that time only thought of a cross as a violent, torturous, humiliating means of execution. A symbol of death. Who would want to follow a man who wanted your full allegiance only to be rewarded with a terrible death?

I don't think most Americans want this... Someone has calculated how a typical life span of 70 years is spent. Listen to these surprising numbers:

Sleep.....23 years....32.9%, Work.....16 years.....22.8%, TV.....8 years.....11.4%, Eating.....6 years.....8.6%, Travel.....6 years.....8.6%, Leisure.....4.5 years....6.5%, Illness.....4 years.....5.7%, Dressing....2 years.....2.8%, Religion...0.5 years.....0.7%  
Total.....70 years.....100%. Now I know there are some of you in this room who are spending far more than .7% of your time with the Bible and prayer, yet for the

majority of Americans less than 1% of their lifetime is spent thinking about God (Brett Blair, Collected Sermons. sermons.com accessed 9/6/25).

What would have happened with the church if the twelve disciples had decided that following Jesus was asking too much of them?

James Moore, a modern Christian writer, in his book *Some things Are Too Good Not To Be True*, tells this story:

Several centuries ago in a mountain village in Europe, a wealthy nobleman wondered what legacy he should leave to his townspeople. He made a good decision. He decided to build them a church. No one was permitted to see the plans or the inside of the church until it was finished. At its grand opening, the people gathered and marveled at the beauty of the new church. Everything had been thought of and included. It was a masterpiece.

But then someone said, "Wait a minute! Where are the lamps? It is really quite dark in here. How will the church be lighted?" The nobleman pointed to some brackets in the walls, and then he gave each family a lamp, which they were to bring with them each time they came to worship.

"Each time you are here" the nobleman said, "the place where you are seated will be lighted. Each time you are not here, that place will be dark. This is to remind you that whenever you fail to come to church, some part of God's house will be dark" (James W. Moore, *Some things Are Too Good Not To Be True*, Dimensions: Nashville, 1994. pp. 117-118).

This story makes a very important point about how important each one of us are to the church. The poet Edward Everett Hale put it like this:

I am only one,  
but still I am one.  
I cannot do everything,  
But still I can do something;  
And because I cannot do everything  
I will not refuse to do the something I can do.

In our gospel lesson today, Jesus has said that to be his disciple a person must give up all their possessions. Yes, his disciples left behind their possessions, their families, their livelihood, but, unless called to a specific religious occupation, we don't have to do this. We just have to think more of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, love God, more than we do our possessions (which by the way includes our time).

Why would we want to do this when what Jesus promised the crowd following him that day was nothing that sounded promising, nothing that sounded good, nothing enticing, it was downright dangerous... Because those people lived on the other side of the resurrection. They did not know of Jesus' promise of eternal life spent in the presence of God.

Nothing is the same since Jesus. We now have a new relation with the things we thought were near and dear. God is changing our relationship to our possessions and our loved ones. He has become present in every aspect of our life; things have changed and will never be the same. With Jesus in our lives, we don't have to allow anything to weigh us down. We can leave behind the things which once held us down as we look for God in each and every aspect of our lives. And God will be there!  
All glory be to God.