

**A Sermon Given By
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It makes sense to count the costs when deciding to make a big purchase such as a home, a car or land. Although it would seem like a good idea to sit down and work the pros/cons and numbers, not everyone takes the time to do so. I wonder how many people count the cost before they enter into these important decisions?

When Jesus spoke of counting costs he used analogies that ring as true today as they did two millennium ago. Clearly, Jesus was concerned about the spiritual costs of being a disciple. At the heart of this passage is the question: What does the Lord require of us? As I've said on numerous occasions before, Jesus calls us to be more than just believers...he calls us to be disciples.

For those of us who have grown up in America, being a disciple of Christ isn't all that difficult. For many in our nation, being a Christian means little more than checking a box on a survey or census. That's why over 80% of Americans say they're Christians, but less than 30% attend church regularly. Since the time of Constantine, actually Emperor Theodosius, we've assumed that if you live in Western society, you're a Christian. Baptism became for many little more than a sign of one's joining the club. But is that what Jesus has in mind for us? As John Wayne might say, "not hardly".

Jesus' parables sometimes enlighten, but at other times muddy the waters. In this passage, Jesus leaves little doubt as to his intentions, and what he says should make us all a little bit uncomfortable.

The message is simple: If you want to be my disciple then you'd better count the costs. It's an "all or nothing" proposition. If you're not ready to jump in with both feet, and stay with the journey until the very end, then perhaps it's best to stay behind.

It's important to remember, Jesus says to us, if you decide to be my follower, it can cost you family, friendships, jobs, and your place in society. And that's the way it was up until Constantine made Christianity a legal religion in the Roman Empire and Theodosius granted it most favored status as Rome's official religion.

No sooner did this take place than things changed for the church. Not only did it become beneficial to be a Christian, but your life might depend upon it. And so, the churches filled up, but the fervor and faith of the people began to decline. The church began to look a bit like Empire. Money, land and power became important. Orthodoxy - right thinking - became the mark of Christian - not the way you lived your life.

Being a Christian in a Christian majority is easy and beneficial. But, converts in countries where Christianity still isn't the majority religion, understand much better than us the truth in Jesus' statement about the costs involved in being a disciple. Some today, actually die because of their faith in Jesus as the Christ.

Our ultimate allegiance must be to the kingdom of God, a kingdom that is defined by the cross. If we're to follow Jesus then we must give over everything to him.

When Jesus calls us to be his disciples, he breaks worldly bonds, and asks us to trust him and follow him, without ever looking back. Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes that no one can follow Christ without recognizing the risk and counting the cost. He says, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die". Tough words. But, that's what it means to take up the cross. Thank goodness we don't have to literally die. But we do have to die to self and become his, and his alone. As scripture says, "you are not your own, you have been bought for a price".

What I hear Jesus saying to us this morning is this: Being a Christian involves making choices, and they're not always easy to make.

So, what does it cost us to be a disciple of Jesus? For Bonhoeffer it meant returning home to Germany from the safety of a teaching post at Union Theological Seminary to take up the struggle against Nazi tyranny. I'm sure he never saw himself being a martyr and despite questions about the wisdom of his choices, he remained true to his calling. As a result, his witness has been an inspiration to many. But, if all we do is live vicariously through his story, we fall short.

This cross I have around my neck this morning is a copy of the cross worn by Pope Francis. It is beautiful and causes me to be mindful of his example to us as Christians. The cross of Jesus is more than a piece of jewelry...it is a way of life. It is not a life of "Be-happy-tudes"...it is a life of self-sacrifice and unconditional love. It is the life to which you are called.

Count the cost. Take the risk. Be more than a believer. Be a Disciple.

AMEN.