

A High Impact Life: Count the Cost

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Luke 14:25-33

So we're continuing our series of sermons on "The High Impact Life" and our Scripture today is one that is troubling to many people. After you hear it read, and as you hear it read, I hope you'll ask yourself, "What does that mean?" Listen now as we hear this Scripture.

Now large crowds were traveling with him; and he turned and said to them, "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions." Luke 14:25-33

You know, if you look at Christina Wells' website it says that her dream has been to be a fulltime vocalist, a fulltime entertainer, and musician. Here's the message of today's Scripture. Following Jesus is more important than that dream. As awesome as that dream is, that dream that possesses you, that you believe in, that is like the most important thing - following Jesus is more important than that.

I was reading about Jose Altuve. He wanted to be a professional baseball player, so he went to the pro baseball tryouts in Venezuela and they sent him home without even trying him out. They said, "You're too short." Well, he is pretty short.

He came back the next day and demanded a tryout. And ultimately the Astros were able to sign him for \$15,000. Amazing. That was his dream. Following Jesus is more important than that

dream for him. That's what this passage begins with. It's that following Jesus is more important than everything. And everything means everything. It's more important than how you parent.

Listen, this is such tough language, "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even life itself cannot be my disciple." So that's so hard for us to get. I think that the secret to it is found in the version in the book of Matthew. In that gospel there's a parallel passage where the other gospel writer remembers it a little differently. That says, "Whoever loves father, or mother more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."

The point is that following Jesus is more important not just than our trivial, unimportant priorities, but that following Jesus is more important than even our most important priority, how we deal and love our family. Following Jesus is more important than that.

Now the other piece to it that maybe makes more sense is that following Jesus is not more important, but it includes it. Following Jesus includes all of our priorities. It includes our dreams. It includes our parenting. It includes how we treat brothers and sisters. It includes our friends, it includes our vocation. It includes everything about our lives.

This is about surrender. That's what today is about - commitment Sunday. This is about surrendering our whole lives - everything - to Jesus. To God's will for our lives.

What did Jesus pray? He had two of his most significant prayers. One was what you said earlier: "Thy will be done. Your will be done. Not my will but your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Your will be done in my life, not my will but your will be done in my life."

What about Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane? I think that's even more powerful. Jesus says, "I don't want to go to the cross. God, I don't want to drink this cup. Nonetheless, not what I want but what you want. Not what I will but what you will." That's a pretty straight forward prayer. Your will be done.

I have a little story that has meant a lot to me. I'm sure I've shared this with you before. It's about an old monk and a young monk. The young monk comes to the old monk and says, "Do you still wrestle with the devil?" The old monk laughs and says, "Oh, I'm far too old and tired for the devil to care anything about me." Then he adds, "I struggle with God now." Then the young monk says, "You struggle with God? Do you hope to win?" Then the old monk replies, "No, I struggle with God and I hope to lose. I have a will, I have this stuff that just takes hold of me and I want to give that up. I want to give it to God."

Think of it like this. I'm not going to give up my dream *for* God, I'm going to give my dream *to* God. I'm going to give every part of my life to God. And what happens is that most of the time we say, "Okay, I'm going to give my church life to God, but I'm going to keep the rest of it myself. I'm going to give my church life and maybe my marriage to God, but I'll keep the rest. No, I think I'll give my church life and my marriage and my family...but I'm going to keep my finances on my own. That's mine."

The whole point here is that we want to give our whole selves to following Jesus. That's what today is about.

These commitment cards that we leave here are just one part of that. You know the Scripture says, "Where your treasure is there your heart will be also." Well, our finances are sort of a leading edge in our lives. As we give, as we're generous, not just to the church but every place as we give our whole lives begin to follow. It's a leading edge. Prayer's a leading edge. Our finances are a leading edge. As we do those things our hearts follow.

It doesn't say, "As your heart is there your treasure will be" it says the opposite. It says, "As your treasure is there your heart will be also." It leads you to give your whole life.

Then the Scripture says this, "Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." What does that mean? So often we use the image of carrying your cross as sort of all the bad stuff in our life. We'll say, "Well, that's my cross to bear. It's all bad stuff."

I want you to think about carrying your cross in a different way. Yes, it's about sacrifice, but it's about giving your life away. Jesus gave his life away on the cross. How are you going to give your life away? Maybe replace the word cross with *calling*. Jesus' *calling* was to go to the cross. What is your *calling*?

It's funny - we always think of a calling as this one big thing. Frederick Buechner says, "Your calling is where your greatest joy and the world's greatest need intersect." Where those two things cross, that's your calling. I think that's true, but I think it's too narrowed a vision of what your calling is. Your calling is everything you do. You don't restrict God's will in your life to this one thing. Your calling is everything you do.

Let me tell you about my calling. Think of it like a pie chart. My calling is to be the pastor of St. Luke's United Methodist Church. I believe that with all my heart. My calling is to be a United Methodist pastor. My calling is to be a father. My calling is to be a husband. My calling is to be a son. My calling is to be a grandfather. My calling is to be a friend. My calling is to be a

citizen. My calling is to be a neighbor to the people who live around me. My calling is to be a volunteer in other organizations.

All of those things are part of my calling. That's all that God's asking me to do. It's not this one narrow thing. Some people get so frustrated because they think, "What is that one thing that I'm going to use to change the whole world?"

Well, friends, it doesn't work that way. All of us have been given this broad sense of calling in which we are to live as disciples and to give all parts of our lives to surrender them to God's will and purpose for us.

So that's what your cross is. We have to clarify and make clear about what are the parts of your life that God is calling you to. And then what you have to do is to marshal all of the resources you have to bring them all together and to deploy them towards that calling.

So here's what God says to you, "I will give you everything you need to accomplish that to which I called you. To accomplish your calling. I will give you everything you need. I'll give you all the money you need. I'll give you all the time you need. I'll give you all the energy, all the talent, all the influence, all the relationships you need. I'll give you all the days of your life. I'll give you enough days in your life to accomplish that to which I called you."

Now here's the tricky part. God says, "I'm going to give you all that, but you've got to manage it. You have to be a steward of it. You have to apply it and deploy it appropriately to all of your calling."

He says in the Scripture, "Which of you intending to build a tower does not first sit down and estimate the cost to see whether he has enough to complete it?" He uses the image of a general contractor. You're going to build something, and you have to see what all your resources are and make sure you can deploy them to accomplish what you want to accomplish.

Or this idea of a king. "Which king going out to wage war against another king will not sit down first and consider whether he's able with 10,000 to oppose the one who comes against him with 20,000."

So will you be able to accomplish what you've been called to do? You've been given all of this. How can I now deploy it best?

It's funny - when I think about this word "stewardship." The word steward means manager. So we're like a manager of all the resources we've been given, and we are to apply them to make an impact on the world that we've been given to accomplish our calling.

Sometimes I think that for me the greatest moment of stewardship when I was younger was not how much I was going to give to the church. The greatest moment of stewardship was whether I would let my five daughters take dance lessons. That's expensive. It takes a lot of time. But that's part of my calling - to raise children. And God says, "I'm going to give you everything you need to accomplish that to which I've called you. You have to manage it."

Is this the best thing you can do with these funds to help raise these children in the right way? Is this going to help them unfold their gifts? I want to be a steward of what you've given me, God, and I want to do it well. That's the idea of marshaling our resources.

I want to close with kind of going back to where we started today. We are to surrender all those pieces of our calling to God. And to say, "God, I can't manage this on my own."

You know surrender is an interesting word because often we think about losing - like when we wave a white flag. That means we've lost. But to surrender spiritually is the right word.

Maybe some of you have been in a 12-Step group. In the first steps you realize you can't do it on your own and you surrender to what the 12 Steps system call a "Higher Power." But it's this realization that "I can't do this on my own. I have to give all parts of my life to you."

We're going to have a time here to come and pray and to commit our lives to following Jesus. I hope in the weeks ahead you just keep saying that prayer in your head: "Your will be done. Your will be done. Your will be done in my life as it is in heaven. Your will be done through my life as it is in heaven." And surrender every part of your life and when you come forward, whether you bring a card or not, it doesn't matter. Let this be a time in which you make that decision. Maybe for the first time and maybe again to surrender your whole life to being a follower of Jesus.

I'm going to lead us in prayer and then I'm going to invite you to come. *O gracious God, we confess that our wills are strong, and we don't want to give them up. But we pray that we might let our wills be taken over by your will, our hearts taken over by your heart. That we would surrender to you. God, give us the discernment to take all you have given us - for which we're so grateful - and use it for the calling for that to which you call us. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.*