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16th Sunday after Pentecost
8 September 2013
Grace-Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
Luke 14:25-35

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

Count the cost.

It's good advice, whether you're a Christian or not.

Our country right now is *counting the cost* of how we might react to the atrocities in Syria.

If we intervene, will there be reaction?

Will it hurt our standing with the UN?

Is it worth it?

We've all seen building projects that fail.

A beautiful house being built that stops mid-construction because the couple gets a divorce.

And we ourselves have started many things that never get brought to completion.

We jump in, excited by the thrill, and then find ourselves in over our head.

Count the cost.

And then there's the Church.

We're looking at starting an intense Hispanic Ministry and Outreach.

What does it cost? What's the budget?

Who will do the work?

How much time and effort are required?

Can we actually pull this off?

Count the cost.

Jesus says,

"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."

(Lk 14:26)

Obviously, Jesus never attended a Church-growth seminar!

"Did He really say" we must hate our family?—

and worse yet, that we must hate our own lives?

If we really counted the cost, none of us would be a disciple.

And it's amazing anyone stuck around with Him after all this!

He puts it as bluntly as possible:

"Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple." (14:27)

Crosses kill.

This isn't some half-way sort of self-imposed suffering,

like giving up chocolate or alcohol for Lent.

This is dropping dead to your entire life –
 your family, your friends,
 your health, and great ideas,
 your wallet and passions,
 and everything you can't possibly live without.

“So,” Jesus says, “*any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.*”
 (14:33)

Again, this isn't just an inconvenience.
 It's not just being made fun of, or joked about for praying before a meal.
 It's not being turned away from a job because the guy saw your cross necklace.
 Jesus is talking about losing your life,
 everything you are and everything you have,
 in order to save your life.

The Christian life isn't easy.
 You can't sell it to people like it's some great idea.
 They won't benefit in the here and now—
 at least, the benefits now won't outweigh the costs.

You can't go around telling people that they'll be happier if they just believe in Jesus.
 Sure, they'll be blessed with an eternal happiness,
 but in the meantime, it means suffering giving everything up.

As a Church, we forget this.
 That, or we don't believe it.
 In many ways, we have things too easy, too comfortable.
 And in all reality, while we thought that would help to grow the church—
 to loosen the reigns a bit,
 it has, in fact, contributed to our decline.

Why would someone join the church for the sake of happiness?
 We can't compete with a bar, or a night club, or even a football game for a lousy team!
 We can't compete with the movies or the sports or the music or the games.
 We can't compete with the therapists, and support groups, and the self-help manuals.
 The Church can't compete with the world.
 And it shouldn't.

Jesus certainly doesn't try.
 In fact, while the massive crowds are elbowing closer to get a glimpse or to hear a word,
 Jesus gives them a big, fat, “No!”

Why?
 Because what they want is the next big thing—
 the next fad or great idea,
 the next cure or buck-making scheme.

But Jesus is heading towards Jerusalem.
 His face is set towards the cross.
 And if you want Jesus, you can't have Him apart from the cross.

Now, *Jesus* has counted the cost.
 He's run the numbers and weighed the odds.
 He came down from the right hand of the Father,
 emptied Himself of His divine honor and glory,
 humbled Himself under His own Law,
 took up His cross and died on it—
 all to redeem us from sin, death, the devil, and our own selves.

The house He builds is the Church, founded on His own body and blood.
 The war He waged wasn't 20,000 vs.10,000, but the whole world against One.

Christ counted the cost and laid down His life for the life of the world!
 Jesus renounced everything—
 family, friends, wealth, power, honor, glory, His whole life—
 to save us, to save *you*.

It's all about Jesus.
 It has to be.

None of us would be disciples if we really counted the cost.
 It's too much.
 We're too tied to ourselves.
 We're dead, born in sin.
 We can't free ourselves and no amount of cost counting and bookkeeping is going to help.

But if you want to try, knock yourself out.
 Try dealing with the wrath of God on your own terms.
 Count the cost; see if you've got enough to justify yourself.
 You don't.

Your cross won't save you; it will kill you.
 And dying doesn't save you.
 But dying in Christ does.
 Being buried with Christ through Baptism into *His* death on *His* cross saves you.

And so we die in order to live.
 We die to ourselves.
 We renounce our lives, our bright ideas, our ambitions and goals, our desires and pleasures;
 we let go of our lives as our own, and trust them to Christ.

And in this way we are to
 hate father and mother, wife and children, brother and sister, yes, even our own selves.

Not by dishonoring them, or even by thinking or feeling negative towards them—
but by recognizing that our life is in Christ alone.

And anything or anyone set against or apart from Christ, must go.

We die in Christ in order to live.

That's what makes us Christians.

We see the cross not just as an instrument of death, but as the means of true life.

But true life is life in Christ, not in or for ourselves.

We've been so focused on being comfortable rather than being crucified,

of saving our life rather than losing it,

of being a winner and in control, rather than a loser in need of forgiveness.

Count the cost.

See that's too much.

And give thanks and praise to Jesus,

that because of Him, the cost is paid in full.

For He gave all He has and all He is for you.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit