

Sermon for September 4, 2016 - 16th Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 14:25–33 (ESV)

Theme: **Being a Christian means:**

- 1) *Loving Christ Alone.*
- 2) *Trusting Christ alone.*

²⁵ Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, ²⁶ “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. ²⁷ Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸ For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, ³⁰ saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ ³¹ Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³² And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. ³³ So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

I can just imagine how fun being a volunteer firefighter would be. You get to face a little danger, play with big equipment, and spend time shooting the breeze with guys at the station – all the while feeling good that you are saving people.

Yes, being a volunteer firefighter would be great: but then why doesn’t everyone do it? I think the biggest reason is that, even though it is voluntary, it still involves commitment. You can’t choose whether or not you want to respond to a call. When the beeper goes off, you have to go. This may mean giving up time with your kids because some electrical short caused a house fire. It might mean giving up a Packer game if someone got into a car accident. Volunteer firefighters can’t be “half-committed” - only responding to the calls they want to respond to. No, you are either all in or all out: there is no middle ground.

In a certain way being a Christian is like being a volunteer firefighter. Just as a fire chief demands total commitment from the men he leads, so also our Savior demands total commitment from us. Let’s consider this truth under the theme: **Being a Christian means:** 1) *Loving Christ alone.* 2) *Trusting Christ alone.*

Part One: *Loving Christ Alone*

Our sermon text takes place while Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. Many people joined him. Why? Probably because they were fascinated by his miracles and intrigued with his teachings. Many toyed with the idea of becoming one of his disciples. They envision how he would miraculously provide for their every need and heal every disease. They imagined all the earthly

benefits they would have as Jesus' disciples without really considering what being a Christian in a sin cursed world actually means.

Now don't get me wrong: Jesus certainly wants disciples. He truly desires the salvation of all!ⁱ But he also knows that superficial, half-hearted Christianity will not benefit anyone. Why not? Because the salvation he came to win can only be received through faith.

This is why he stopped, turned to the crowd and said: *"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.*

What? Did we hear Jesus correctly: unless we hate our own family, we cannot be his disciples? How are we to understand this statement? Well, we certainly should not understand it in the sense that Jesus wants us to wish evil or harm on them. Remember: this is the same Jesus who also commanded husbands to love their wivesⁱⁱ and children to honor their parentsⁱⁱⁱ. He, in fact, commands us to love all people - including our enemies!^{iv}

No, when Jesus says that we must "hate" those we hold most dear – including ourselves – we must understand Jesus' words in the context of the first commandment, the meaning of which Luther explains as: "We should fear love and trust in God above all things."

I think one of the best ways to understand what Jesus means is to think about the account of Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah.^v Do you remember that story? The LORD told Abraham to sacrifice his only son Isaac on that mountain. This was a test to see whether or not Abraham truly feared, loved and trusted in God above all things. One could only imagine the shock and turmoil Abraham felt at this command. But what did Abraham do? He got Isaac and set out for Moriah early the next morning. He loved the LORD above all and was even willing to sacrifice his own son, if God commanded him. Thankfully, the LORD stopped him from doing that. He provided a ram to be used in place of Isaac. He also allowed this story to be recorded in the Bible for at least two reasons: 1) to give us an example of what it means to love God above all things, and 2) to provide an illustration of how God would sacrifice his own Son for our salvation.

When Jesus says that a disciple must hate everyone he holds dear – including his own life – what he means is this: Being a Christian means more than just loving God more than our family friends and neighbors. Being a Christian means that we love Christ alone. Why? Because he is our God and Savior who called us into a special relationship with him! And just as a husband loves his wife to such a degree that he would hate any woman who would attempt to break the marriage bond he has with her, so also Jesus wants us to be faithful to him – loving him alone and hating person or thing that wants to separate us from him.

But this kind of love is difficult. Unbelieving family members and friends often try to tear us away from Christ. When we lovingly warn them of their unbelief they sometimes lash out at us, saying that we should love and accept them as they are. Is that true? Does true love mean that we have to respect their life-style choices? No, it doesn't! Knowing what Christ says in the Bible, we can't condone their wicked behavior. Christ's love compels us witness the truth. This

will lead us to reject their sin and lovingly call them to repentance. And if they threaten to shut us out of their lives unless we accept their unbelief? Well, then the Christian will prayerfully bear this rejection for Christ's sake – keeping with what Jesus says next: ²⁷ *Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.*

To understand Jesus' words we have to think about what a cross meant to first century Jews living under Roman rule. A cross was a most horrible instrument of torture. It was the emblem of total shame and excruciating pain. No one would willingly take up a cross – no one except Jesus, that is.

Jesus was so totally committed to saving us from our sins that he chose to take up the cross in order to suffer the punishment we deserve. He ~~suffered and~~ died for the sins of the whole world so that whoever believes in him may not perish, but have eternal life.^{vi}

But even though Jesus took up his cross willingly, we must understand that the reason he was crucified was because the world hated him. They did not want to believe that their actions were evil. They didn't want to believe that they needed a Savior from sin. If the world treated Christ this way, should we Christians expect anything different?

Being a Christian means that people we love might pressure us to make a choice between Christ or them. This is a hard because no one wants to lose the love of another. And yet, as a Christian, there can only be one answer: Being a Christian means loving Christ alone. No other relationship matters because no other relationship saves.

Part Two: Trusting Christ alone.

To emphasize our need to take our faith in him seriously, Jesus offers two illustrations. He says: ²⁸ *For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?* ²⁹ *Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him,* ³⁰ *saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'* *Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?* ³² *And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.*

No ancient King would build a grandiose monument without making sure he had the resources to complete it. Why not? Because, instead of erecting a monument to his greatness, an unfinished tower would be testimony to his folly.

The same is true regarding war: a wise king would never attack an enemy unless he is sure that he had the resources to win. Doing otherwise would be disastrous!

The point of these parables is this: just as building a tower and waging a war are not things you rush into without giving serious thought, so also following Christ requires serious reflection.

We Christians are at war. Our enemies are the devil, world and our own sinful nature. Do we, in and of ourselves have the power to battle these enemies?

A Christian's life is meant to glorify God? Do we, in and of ourselves, have the resources to make our lives such a monument to Christ?

Only a rash fool would say yes. The truth, however, is that there is not a single person on this earth who has what it takes to be a disciple of Christ. If left to our own power, we would fail miserably. And this is exactly the conclusion Jesus wants us come, as he says next: *So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.*

Being a Christian means that we don't trust in ourselves; we trust in Christ alone. Without his forgiving love, aid and instruction, we could never fashion our lives into a monument dedicated to his glory. Without his power, protection and strength we could never overcome our spiritual enemies. Like the apostle Paul in our first reading^{vii}, Jesus wants us to see the truth about ourselves and our accomplishments: it's all rubbish: Being a Christian means that we realize the futility of everything we have and are and lay them at the cross saying: "LORD, I am nothing and can offer nothing. Everything I am and have is of no value. You are the only thing that matters, for only you can save me. Only you can reconcile me to the God the Father and give me the hope of eternal life. Only you give my life true meaning and purpose. Forgive my sin and cover me with your righteousness so that I can be the disciple you want me to be – all to the glory of your name."

And do you know what? Jesus hears such a heartfelt prayer and answers it by forgiving all our sins and covering us with his righteousness. Through faith, His perfect love and obedience to God becomes our perfect love and obedience to God. Through faith we have all the resources we need to defeat our spiritual enemies and live our lives to his glory. He gives us all these things in His Word.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: just as no one wants a half-hearted volunteer firefighter, who only answers the call when it suits him; so also Christ doesn't want half-hearted disciples who are still torn between serving him and their own selfish sinful natures. This is why he calls us to carefully consider what being a Christian will mean for our lives on this earth. He doesn't do this to chase us away from him. He does it so that, when difficult days comes, we might cling to Christ all the more – loving and trusting in him alone for forgiveness, life and salvation. This is what it being a Christian is all about. Amen.

ⁱ Cf. 1 Timothy 2:4

ⁱⁱ Cf. Ephesians 5:25

ⁱⁱⁱ Cf. Exodus 20:12

^{iv} Cf. Luke 6:27

^v Cf. Genesis 22

^{vi} Cf. John 3:16

^{vii} Cf. Philippians 3:7-11