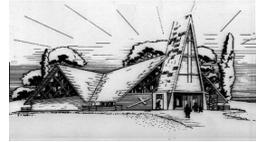




Free Evangelical Lutheran  
Synod in South Africa

## Sermon - Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 18C)

“The full cost of discipleship”!



St. John's Lutheran Parish Shelly Beach

• The Word of God for this Sermon is written in Luke 14,25-35:

- <sup>ESV</sup> 25 And great crowds were journeying with him, and turning he 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 and even his own life also, he is not able to be my disciple.
- 27 Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me, he is not able to be my disciple.
- 28 “For who out of you, wishing to build a tower, does not first sit down, count up the cost, whether he has [enough] for completion?
- 29 In order that, lest placing a foundation and not being able to finish it all, the onlookers begin to mock him,
- 30 saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to complete it.’
- 31 Or what king, journeying toward another king to engage in war, does not sit down first, take counsel whether he is able with ten thousand to go to meet the one coming against him with twenty thousand?
- 32 If not, while he is still far away, sending an embassy, he asks the things that have to do with peace.
- 33 In this way, then, every one of you who does not renounce all his own possessions, he is not able to be my disciple.
- 34 “Therefore, salt is good. But if even the salt itself becomes insipid, by what means will it be seasoned?
- 35 Neither for the earth nor the rubbish heap is it suitable; they will throw it out. The one having ears to hear, let him hear.”

• *Let us pray: Come Holy Spirit, open our ears and our hearts so that we will consider the full cost of discipleship and ask You for the things that give peace! Amen.*

### • **Dear Congregation in Christ!**

• Jesus was not popular amongst the Pharisees and lawyers, yet He still drew large crowds amongst the people! As Jesus got closer and closer to Jerusalem resistance against Him got fiercer and fiercer, especially amongst the leaders of the Jews. Jesus was still busy with catechesis. He was still busy teaching the Twelve, and a wider circle of followers, what the Kingdom is all about. In the passage for today He teaches us about the consequences and the cost of discipleship!

• We are invited to the final, end-time banquet! Yet, this invitation has its consequences. To repent and receive the gift of the kingdom means to be baptised into Jesus' death!

- Three consequences of Baptism, of discipleship, are announced in this passage: [1] hating your family, [2] carrying the cross, and [3] leaving your possessions behind.
- [1] Hating your family! This is sore in our ears to hear this. Having to hate our family, our father, mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters- our closest blood relatives and to top it all, our life, our soul! Who can be a disciple of Christ if this is the cost of discipleship? And what about the fourth and fifth commandment that we should love and obey our parents and love our neighbour as ourselves?
- We have to understand this in the context of the Jewish laws of kinship. When you were born a Jew they took it as meaning having direct access to God's kingdom because of their birthright, because they were physical descendants from the patriarchs of Israel!
- But, now Jesus came and overturned the Jewish law of kinship. Jesus revealed a kinship, dependant on a completely new kind of birth. Membership is by grace through faith alone, handed out by the means of catechesis and Baptism! Of these people Jesus says, *“My mother and my brothers are those who hear the Word of God and do it” [Lk 8,21]*.
- Only if one realises and sees this family as of first importance can one fear and love God above all and rightly love and honour fellow Christians, our human family and even our enemies. But, as long as our own physical family takes the first place in our lives, we are not following Jesus!
- As baptised Christians the closest family we have are all those whom Jesus has made members of His Body together with us! The relationship with all other members of His Body is the closest relationship we find ourselves in because they all have received the Holy Spirit of God!
- The indescribable is true: As members of the Body of Jesus Christ we are closer together than as man and wife, than as blood-brothers or sisters. Now, if my parents, my wife and my family are also baptised into Christ we are closer to one another if we are in Christ than when we would have been if we would have been physical relatives only! The closest closeness is between people who are united in Christ!
- This spiritual closeness is not necessarily always something that we feel or experience. Therefore Jesus reveals this to us. It is a given because of God's act of Grace. It is the new reality we find ourselves in. Therefore we should not fight against it, but follow Jesus in this.
- What Jesus teaches here corrects the over-emphasis of “family” in our times. There are many movements which try and make the family the nucleus, the centre of society. There is much merit in this attempt especially in a world which preaches on all channels *“its all about me!”*
- But, this is not the proper solution. This solution is not drastic enough, just emphasising family more than the self, because it still tries to work with the old Self!

- Therefore, Jesus reveals the real, new, end-time and everlasting nucleus to us, namely His Body, the Church! Here, gathered as baptised new born believers in Christ, we have the deepest unity with the purest Truth! Here, and wherever Christ is the Host of His end-time meal, we participate in the deepest unity of the Trinity. Jesus, crucified, resurrected and ascended, with both His Spirit and Body, Jesus as true man and God, is the nucleus that binds us tightly together!
- In light of this revelation, if your family would say for example, *'lets go fishing on a Sunday morning'*, or *'lets go watch how this or that family member does sport'* or *'lets all sleep in'* whilst the Lord has invited you to His ongoing end-time meal, and you would go along with your physical family, then you would love your family more than Jesus and the church. You would neglect to take in your place in the Kingdom of God. You would basically withdraw your discipleship from the Body of Christ! That is how drastically Jesus evaluates it! He sees it as an act against the first commandment!
- We have to realise the sinfulness of all our relatives! Unity and peace with them does not make us disciples of Christ! It works the other way round. We need to be united with Christ first! Then we can love them in a godly way.
- The second consequence is tightly connected to the first one, namely to carry ones cross and follow Jesus! These are spoken to those who have heard the Word, have left family, where it was necessary, and understand a bit better the cost of discipleship! They follow Jesus, but as they travel with Jesus on their way to Jerusalem they begin to encounter rejection and persecution. Their carrying their cross is not applauded but rejected and mocked by others!
- What this refers to is the fact that we will encounter these kind of troubles on our way to our own death and resurrection. The path of a Christian in this life, in this world, leads through many shadows of death and afflictions.
- As Christians we have to know this and take this into account! It is irresponsible to believe that all will be plain sailing and when tough times come we abandon the Word of God! For this very reason the teaching of the prosperity gospel is plain wicket, is evil, because it gives you a false and cheap hope.
- Jesus says, you have to consider the full cost of discipleship. Otherwise you will begin to build, but you will not be able to finish. Then Jesus uses a parable of a king going out to war. This parable is key to the understanding of our passage. Listen closely. Jesus says: what king who goes out to war does not sit down and considers first of all if he could win the war! If the other king comes with an army double the size of his own army it would not make sense to engage in war. Why? Because if he is sober-minded he would clearly realise he would never be able to win this war. So, what other option does he have then?

- The only other option left, unless he wants to loose the war, is to send a delegation and *“ask the things that have to do with peace”!*
- Then Jesus applies this parable and says: *“In this way, then, every one of you who does not renounce all his own possessions, he is not able to be my disciple.”* What does this mean? If we honestly take into consideration the full cost of discipleship we can only come to the conclusion: *“I cannot do it”*. I cannot win this war with God! I cannot by my own strength or reason or my own decision be Jesus' disciple. I can make the decision hundred times over that I will become a disciple of Jesus and try and fulfil the full cost of discipleship. But, warns Jesus, you are not going to make it unless you renounce all that belongs to you, all your strengths including your family, your life, your intellect, your desire and decision to become a disciple! All these, which depend on what belongs to you, does not have the ability to make you a disciple of Christ Jesus!
- What is the only other option left? *“Ask for the things that have to do with peace!”* Ask for peace and mercy at the right person, that He will give you the peace, that He will take the full cost of your discipleship on Himself and pay for you! Ask Jesus, who lays out in front of you the full heavy cost of discipleship, ask Him to give you the things that have to do with peace! Do not try and count on what belongs to your self, your heritage or anything of your old self!
- Consider the full cost of discipleship and realise how much Jesus has paid for you, so that you are invited to come to the end-time banquet of God's peace! Fully undeservedly! Therefore we repent by renouncing all our possessions as counting in our favour before God. Whoever does not hate these possessions, namely as payment to try and earn God's peace, cannot be a disciple of Christ.
- Therefore we confess that Jesus has paid for us the things that we need for peace with God! He has begun to build the temple of God and He will complete the Church of God because He has already paid the full price of it! It is finished! It is fully paid in advance!
- And what about tribulations in our life? We endure those as being salt to the earth! We endure suffering and mocking and hardship as a witness for the cross of Christ in the world! We confess before the world in our suffering and tribulations, I am a disciple of Jesus, because He has paid the full cost for my discipleship when He was crucified! The same He has done for you! *Amen.*
- *Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (<sup>ESV</sup> Eph 3,20-21).*