

Luke 14:25-35
Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 7, 2025

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

And Jesus turned and said to them... "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple."

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Last week, we enjoyed the gloriously comforting image of Jesus the host inviting to the feast those who cannot repay, saying "Come, eat and drink without price," and those penitent unworthy rejoicing and blessing His name that He looked not at their unworthiness but at the glory of their inclusion in the feast that will manifest itself by sight at the resurrection of the just.

Not only did we enjoy the wondrous image of that gracious invitation, but apparently so did the crowds. Our text begins, "Now great crowds accompanied Jesus." Well, who *wouldn't* when hearing that this divine host wants nothing more than to use the holy Sabbath to bring rescue and safety and joyous feasting to those who follow him?

But, one of the great things about our Lord, one of the things we often overlook and underestimate, is how brutally honest he is with us. Even from the first shadows of fallen Eden, "You will return to the dust," and again, "70 years or, if by reason of strength, 80 years..." and certainly "no more than 120 years" ... and even, He says,

“Unless you repent, you will likewise perish.” Brutally honest! Doesn’t sugarcoat it or sweettalk it; just brutally honest... for our benefit!

So, today, we see that he reads the crowds’ hearts – He reads *our* hearts! We who rejoice over such grace He gives us in our divine rest – He reads us with the crowds and says to both, “Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.”

That’s brutally honest: “You are going to have crosses to bear, and if you refuse to bear them, you cannot learn from me.”

At first, we might be shocked by these words: “Wait a minute! What happened to, ‘Come, eat and drink *without price*?’” True, a price to earn God’s favor – no need for that; Christ has paid that price, that the holy God would look with favor upon you. Your sins are paid for, condemnation averted, you are one with God.

But ‘bearing your crosses’ is not about paying a price *to God*. It’s about carrying the weight of all those people and things around you. To be a disciple (and, recall, disciple means “one who learns”)... to learn from Jesus is not just to learn about your justification before God; it’s also to learn what to expect in this fallen world as one who follows Jesus.

Rather than leaving it to us to imagine all the frustrations we bear, Jesus paints the images for us (it should comfort us that he knows what we should expect), and those images are highlighted by three distinct refrains of “[If you do not carry *this*...], you cannot be

my disciple.” Three distinct uses of that refrain, not to be read as threats but simply stating the reality... each highlighting one aspect of daily life in this fallen world that you must recognize (you might say “embrace”) sober-mindedly if you are going to be Christ’s disciple:

First, “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.” Now before you get mad at Jesus for such a demand, understand that we English-speakers are at a great deficiency in understanding this statement. For we think of the word “hate” as meaning to despise, to have anger against and bitterness towards, to see as our worst enemy and curse them to hell!

But, that’s not what the word “hate” means in the Scriptures, at least not in all cases. Yes, the Greek word μισεω can refer to ‘detesting’ someone. But, more often it is used comparatively, so that you simply ‘love less.’ You might imagine the lighter side of a weigh scale. In fact, when Jesus teaches us to love our neighbor properly, he tells us to “love your neighbor *as yourself*...” Not *less than* (hatred), but also not more than (idolatry). The same. But you are to love God *more than* yourself, your neighbor, your father and mother, your family and friends, your own life.

That’s Jesus’ point in this first reality-check. If you love yourself, your parents, your wife and children, *anyone* more than

Christ and do not love Christ more than them, you will fall into idolatry and will not be willing to learn from Jesus. You'll hear him selectively, only as it suits your pleasure.

How often have I made this point in wedding sermons: "Husband, love Christ *more than* your wife; and He will teach you how to love your wife the very best she can be loved."

So, the first reality-check of being Christ's disciple is that the student can only learn with his whole heart, soul, and mind if Jesus is more than a situational 'teacher/Rabbi' for the individual, but is the true God on which the whole heart, soul, and mind depends and in which the whole person may be confident.

The second-reality check comes right on the heels of the first: "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple." It's one thing to not love other people more than Jesus. It's another thing to still trust Jesus when life in this fallen world means you are bearing burdens... and not just minor conveniences, but heavy crosses, crosses borne precisely because that's the natural consequence of life in this fallen world.

When Adam sinned, God came quickly to him and spoke the Gospel promise of how this all – in God's good timing – would be fixed and eventually fully reversed in the resurrection... But God *also* spoke to Adam the *consequences* of Sin and the Fall, consequences and crosses Adam and Eve and their generations would all endure – pain in childbearing, toil in our work, vanity in our production, the

constant knowledge that we would return to the dust. We could even broaden those images to the various ‘separations’ the Fall caused and see the crosses we bear psychologically and emotionally (anxiety, depression, sleepless nights); the crosses we bear ‘sociologically’ and interpersonally because of our fellow man – yes, even our fellow Christian!... the crosses we bear because of a world that is passing away, and especially the crosses we bear physiologically because of our own bodies passing away.

How often is a day, week, month, year – even an entire season of life – consumed by our focus on the crosses we bear. But, *why* are we consumed by them? Doesn’t Jesus hint at that when he says not just, “Whoever does not bear his own cross cannot be my disciple”, but instead he says, “Whoever does not bear his own cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” We assume that means, “follow his example and how he bore his cross.” But, more importantly, Jesus is saying, “Whoever does not bear his own cross and *trust* me, be confident in my promises...”

This is why we become *consumed* with our crosses for a day, a week, a month, a year, even an entire season of life... because we forget that Jesus’ promises and *His* answers will carry the situation; and we bear our cross as if following ourselves, as if we have to have the answers for our own cross-bearing. As if we have to have answers for the psychological, sociological, ecological, physiological crosses we bear. And when we think of them that way, and when we

think we're just meant to follow his *example* of carrying his cross, we accidentally equate *our* cross to *his* (even might say, "I carry mine like He carried His")... and we thereby unwittingly remove His cross from center stage and replace it with our own.

Christ's cross is no mere example.. no mere "version" of what we now bear. This is why Jesus doesn't say, "Whoever does not bear *the* cross", but instead says, "Whoever does not bear *his own* cross." Our crosses need not consume us, they are bearable and therefore ought be faithfully borne, precisely because His cross is *the* cross that fixed everything, that (if you will) consumed all the power and threat of that which often consumes us. Because that which often consumes us all has its foundation in *sin* (our psychological, sociological, ecological, physiological crosses all have their foundation in Sin)... and where His cross cancels the power and threat of Sin, then it also (in due time) will remove our crosses from us (remember, last week, the great glory is "the resurrection of the just", when all these crosses are no more).

So we need not live in anxiety and depression; we may bear the lifelong reproach of the non-Christian and the temporary wounds from the penitent Christian; we may still enjoy God's designed beauty in this decaying creation; and we may be confident as our physical life wanes and bold even in the hour of death for our loved ones and even for ourselves... Because Christ's cross has canceled

the power and threat of all of it. And, thus, we may bear our crosses with conviction and follow Him.

The one thing that has the power to prevent us from that? – our own doubt of Christ and love of Self. So, Jesus' third refrain: "Any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple." That's the only thing – our trepidation when we count the cost to this earthly life, the temporal cost of following Christ – that's the only thing that can tempt us to not follow. What do I mean by that?

Jesus gives two analogies – first, the man who begins to build and is unable to finish. That's the fear of the Christian – that his faith, built on the promises of Christ, will not see their completion... and his faith will be mocked by all. That's perhaps the biggest struggle for us – that we are *not* vindicated this side of death, but the other side of death. And so, we know the world will mock us because the world sees the Christian's effort to build on his hope as *never* being completed, *never* being rewarded, *never* being accomplished. Do we easily forget because of the noise of the jeering in our ear... do we easily forget that Christ is the author *and* perfecter of our faith? That *He* authoritatively proclaimed from the cross, "It is *accomplished!*", so that our faith may always build on him, with certainty that our building will not be in vain?

The second analogy: a king going out to war, realizing that he's far outmatched and waving the white flag of surrender that at

least brings peace. Isn't that the other fear for the Christian? – that he always feels he's outmatched by the devil and the world and, therefore, he's constantly tempted to surrender to it all so as to at least have peace in his life of surrender.

Are we so timid before the world, so lulled by the devil whispering promises of peace, that we are not willing to wager our lives that Christ is truly the King He has ascended into the heavens to be: “*All* authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me,” our divine brother says... the true Lord of life and death and over all creation.

And, as He is, that means he's *already* Master over you, *already* your true King, whether you are confident in that or not. Notice, Jesus isn't calling you to “choose him” as if he's auditioning for the part. He's saying, “the only one who will rightly be my disciple and learn from me is the one who recognizes what it means to follow me... even through the hardships of this fallen creation.”

So, it's not about choosing to enter into this relationship. You're already there! Consider the Old Testament reading – “choose life!” – the Lord says to a people He has already rescued from Egypt, delivered through Red Sea waters, and sustained in the wilderness for 40 years (and the epistle says it's *Jesus* who led them!) Interestingly, Joshua makes exhortation almost the same exact way to the *next* generation when they've *already* inherited the promised land and God has cleared it of their enemies!... Joshua says, “Choose

which god you will serve [but it's only YHWH, the LORD, who is the living God]... as for me and my house, we will serve YHWH." So, it's not about 'choosing Jesus' to be your Savior. He's already chosen you! – "You did not choose me; I chose you!" He tells his disciples. You've already been entered into this Church of his – Christ putting the sign of the cross on your forehead and the devil putting a target on your back!

That's the sobering reality... that you may hear what Jesus is saying to you: "If you want to follow me and learn from Me who saved you, expect that the student is never above his master, the Christian will not fare differently in the world than his Lord, and – if the world hates you, it hated me first."

So, it's not about choosing to enter the fray. You're *in* the fray. But, Jesus, brutally honest Jesus, says, "You're going to be tempted to ask yourself whether this is worth holding onto."

And the Christian zealously responds: "No, this is worth fighting for! This is worth enduring everything else!... bearing all my crosses! BUT, I haven't the strength." Very true. We often don't have the strength and we grow weak in the confession that preserves us as salt preserves, and we are tempted to go the easy route of our hope being just as bland and tasteless as the world's hopelessness.

So, Jesus points us back to the feast, and He says, "Return to the table. Come, eat anew, drink anew, without price. Be forgiven of your anxieties, your unbelief, your self-reliance. And taste and

receive the first body and blood to experience the resurrection, that you may be renewed in your hope that you will share in that resurrection, where all ripple effects of the Fall and Sin will have been reversed and where all things will be made new. And having tasted and been strengthened by that first body and blood of the resurrection, you may take up your crosses and follow Me,” Jesus says, “keeping your eyes fixed on My cross so as to lighten your own, as you follow unto the promised land of the resurrection where I have gone.”

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

Rev. Mark C. Bestul
Calvary Lutheran Church
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