

Luke 14:25-33
Nachfolge
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When I was in high school my mom handed me a book and said read this. I didn't know the author, by the title I saw that it was probably something to do with faith, little did I know that it would change my life.

What I didn't know at the time was the background of the author. Born in a privileged family in Germany, soared through school earning doctoral degrees by the age of 21, all doing so in the years leading up to the rise of Nazi Germany.

When he was in his early 30s he began to speak out against Hitler, not something many were doing then. In fact, because of his deep conviction that a true Christian must help those who are suffering—and for him this was mainly the Jews of Germany—he eventually became involved in the resistance to Hitler, and then even in an assassination plot against him. This was not the typical path we would expect from a Pastor and Theologian. Because of his convictions he was eventually imprisoned and murdered by the Nazis, just three weeks before the end of the war. And to add even more intrigue and marvel to the story, this man was just 39 years old, engaged to be married, had begun a resistance seminary for the training of pastors who would be faithful to the gospel and not to the Third Reich.

Who wouldn't be fascinated by the life of such a brilliant and brave man of God?

This man's name was Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and the book that my mom handed me so many years ago—unfortunately without any of the backstory of the author—was his magnificent work entitled *Nachfolge* which is literally translated in English as Discipleship. We have it today in our hands by the name *The Cost of Discipleship*.

Bonhoeffer is just one example of a long history of men and women who after hearing the Gospel of Jesus Christ were so cut to the heart by its transformative message that they literally gave everything they had to receive it, and in service to it. In fact one of Bonhoeffer's most famous quotes goes like this: “when Christ calls a man or woman, he bids them come and die.”

Jesus Christ invites you and me not into a life of success, not of overcoming, not of happiness, and not of contentment, though each of these and more do happen in the life of a Jesus follower. But the invitation that Jesus extends further than any other is the invitation to faithfulness and trust. And though there are blessings that come, the other side of that coin will always be that fidelity to his call and to his voice come at a cost.

Have you considered the cost of following and belonging to Jesus? Not the cost of attending church or giving to this community with your time and talent, but what allegiances will be challenged when the one voice that can give life says to you, follow me. What has it cost you? This morning Jesus is calling you and you and you and you and me to the carpet. Have you considered what it will cost you to receive this gift of life and to follow me?

I invite you to stand with me as I read for us from Luke 14 continuing with verses 25 to 33.

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. ²⁷Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, ³⁰saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ ³¹Or 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? ³²And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. ³³So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

I’ve told this story from the pulpit before, but the four years I spent in college was a play in two acts, and the first act was a tragedy. As a sophomore in college I had worked hard for the last two years building an identity as a student and as a member of our college’s baseball team. Which was particularly challenging since the guy at my position a year ahead of me would go on to be a four year All-American and draft pick for the LA Dodgers. So, as you can imagine, I didn’t see a lot of playing time. And what’s worse I was plagued by what has come to be known as the yips, Steve Sax syndrome, named for the longtime second baseman who at one point in his career experienced a break in his psyche such that he could no longer throw a baseball, something he’d done without thinking for two decades from second base to first base. It was either air mail or pounded into the ground.

All of this made for a sophomore year that was characterized by the desperate attempts to earn the acceptance of my teammates as friends, and the reward of playing time on the field. I was a wreck. One night late in the year I was alone in my room, having just discovered that everyone on my team had gone out together...without me. I literally felt alone and without direction. And as a last-ditch hail mary, since I had grown up in church I said a prayer. Lord I don’t know what I’m doing, I feel alone, and I don’t know which way to go.

Finally, I had gotten to the end of myself, I had come to the place where the life of my making that casually included Jesus was presented with a moment of decision. I was being called. Alone. Frightened and in solitude. Every attempt to build a life that was successful and happy had hit bottom. I needed a mediator, I needed a rescue, and I needed him now.

As Jesus stood in front of that crowd that day he said as plainly as he could, unless you alone make the decision to come and follow me, you cannot be my disciple. Do you think this is the kind of thing you say if you want to build a big church or a big following? I wouldn’t. But what Jesus is saying is 1. You cannot come and follow me by a gradual undertaking, you can’t marry or be born into the faith, God doesn’t have any grandchildren. You also do not become his disciple by joining a church or getting involved in the life of a congregation. Yes, the Church is the body of Christ, but each one of us individually one of him. Jesus comes to look us individually in the eye and ask do **you** know that **you** are in need of a mediator?

It's immediate, it's dramatic. Look at the way in which Jesus came into this world, it was dramatic, it was immediate, it was individual. Jesus left eternity and entered this world that he had created as an infant child becoming incarnate to reveal the God with us Emmanuel here and now. And he's inviting you to look closely and think deeply about the life you've created and whether, as the writer of Ecclesiastes puts it, "it's all just vapor, wind, vanity."

The second thing this face to face calling does is invite us to look at the things in our lives that we place our trust in, and even make idols of. Now remember an idol doesn't begin as something evil, idols are good things that are given ultimate significance and place in our lives, taking the place of God.

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.**

This is a really challenging passage. Is Jesus telling us that we're supposed to hate our moms and dads? No, that's not it. What Jesus is warning us against is the life that we believe we are able to create for ourselves. The family we believe we have created, the job or security, the children or the gifts that we have because we believe we have worked hard and sacrificed and been responsible—he's challenging the very notion of American pride and self-assertion.

What Jesus is saying is that the thought that any of these is ours because of what we have done is a slippery slope to idolatry. Jesus is the mediator, Jesus stands always closer and more immediate between our relationship to our moms and dads, our children and friends. Jesus is the giver of all life John 1 says that he is the LOGOS, the Word who was in the beginning with the Father. And so that anytime we are prone to put someone or something in that place between us and God, Jesus says we are to hate that relationship.

Now hate is a really strong word. A famous biblical scholar FF Bruce pointed out in his book *The Hard Sayings of Jesus*, there is throughout the Bible a tendency to use the word "hate" when what is really meant is a secondary form of love. So when in Deuteronomy 21:15 there are regulations for a man with two wives (one of who is loved and one of whom is hated) the meaning is not that there is literal, visceral hatred per se of the second wife but more that the second wife is less preferred than the first. Similarly when God says things like "Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated," the meaning is not that God literally hates Esau or his kin in the colloquial use of that word but rather that Jacob was preferred over Esau and that Esau, therefore, received love but a love that was perhaps a bit less in intensity or scope.

Twice Jesus says in these verses that you have to give up everything and take up a cross if you are going to follow him. The implication is that these people had not done that but had found it altogether too easy to fall into line behind Jesus. They had given primary reality to other things. Jesus is inviting them, and inviting you and me to realize that all we have comes from God and what we have that does not come from the incarnation is not from God.

Bonhoeffer writes later in *Discipleship* that "We cannot rightly acknowledge the gifts of God unless we acknowledge the Mediator for whose sake alone they are given to us. There can be no genuine thanksgiving for the blessings of nation, family, history, and nature without that heartfelt penitence which gives glory to Christ alone above all else. There can be no real attachment to the given creation, no genuine responsibility in the world, unless we recognize the breach which already

separates us from it. There can be no genuine love of the world except the love wherewith God loved it in Jesus Christ.”

How many of us in the church today are not there in large part because we were raised in the church? Yes, at some point most of us made some kind of conscious decision to be a follower of Jesus: we willingly went through confirmation, we initiated our own profession of faith, we underwent the sacrament of baptism, etc. But do those formal, “typical” ways of growing up into church membership rise to the level of thoughtful seriousness and astute calculations that Jesus talks about in Luke 14?

There is only one mediator, it ultimately him with whom we must deal. Now of course our one mediator Christ has a Church through whom his gifts and blessings are manifest, but be cautious not to confuse who really is doing the work here. Wabash Presbyterian is only a Church insofar as her primary mode of being is to be the vessel of Christ. WPC does not do the saving, WPC cannot give you meaning or purpose, WPC is only a family insofar as the lifeblood that unites us is Christ's. We can have all the meals, do all the fellowship, start all the ministries, be about all the causes, but unless we are daily bending our lives to Christ alone and being nourished at his table, we are making even this place an idol—which Jesus calls us to hate.

There is only one Word which we must obey in life and in death, there is only one mediator, and he wants to know and be in intimate relationship with you. Have you taken time to consider your relationship with Jesus lately? Is he taking his place among the abundance of competing values and time commitments, or is he the one Word that was and is at the beginning and the end of your day, and everywhere in between? Is Jesus your Alpha and Omega, or is he a part of the alphabet soup of your life? I'm going to ask Rick to come up and we're going to do something that we don't often do. For the next few minutes, simply in the quiet of your own hearts and in the quiet of this place I want to invite you to allow Jesus to once again sit on the throne of your heart. Consider whether or not you have made Jesus Lord of your life and if you wish to finally give up the work of creating a life for yourself and instead receive it through the mediator I want you to quietly right where you sit ask Jesus to be Lord of your life.

In the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer: we all have to enter upon discipleship alone, we do not remain alone. If we take him at his word and dare to become individuals, our reward is the fellowship of the Church. A visible brother and sisterhood to compensate a hundredfold for all we have lost. He or she who leaves their father or mother for Jesus' sake does most assuredly find father and mother and brothers and sisters again in the promise of a new fellowship.