

What Is Your Cost

Pentecost 13, Year C,

Sermon by Rev. Glenn. A. Brumbaugh

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Philemon 1:8-21 / Luke 14:25-33

What do you think of when you think of something costing you?

Is it a price tag at the store? An amount to be deducted from your account?

That's probably the most common response among us.

We tend to think in monetary terms when we hear that expression.

But there are other ways to think about cost.

Sometimes cost is a physical manifestation.

Choices we make can exact a physical cost to our bodies,
in terms of fatigue, injury, or illness.

However, common to all the conceptions of "cost"

is a sense of giving up something.

It's defined as what we give up

to acquire, accomplish, or produce something.

It involves a measure of sacrifice and perhaps loss or penalty
in gaining something.

Cost requires effort and resources, in whatever form they take.

The greek word for cost, *dapane*,

occurs only once in the entire New Testament,
in this passage.

From the greek root verb *dapto*,
which literally means to tear or devour,
there is a real sense
of something being torn away and consumed.

In this mornings gospel lesson, Jesus is making some pretty bold statements.

It's all centered around this concept of cost, in this case,
the cost of being his disciple.

It seems that Jesus is saying we need to kick our families to the curb,
even our own life, in order to follow him.

It's certainly language we can find ourselves getting hung up on,
or just brushing past to consider the rest of the passage.

Neither course would I recommend.

Throughout this entire passage Jesus is making a point about our priorities.

Earlier in the chapter, he tells the parable of the great banquet,
where the host chooses to fill his table with outcasts
rather than those he invited who had better plans.

He also points out that one sometimes has to make tough choices
on whether to observe Sabbath laws, or alleviate the suffering of others.

This chapter is all about choices and costs.

So it should be no surprise that he wraps it up with some clarification.

To follow Jesus means absorbing a cost,
a commitment that involves dedication to a different perspective
that is a often a radical departure from the norms one is used to.

It is a life of prophetic witness;
witnessing to a way of life often at odds
with the norms of life around us, a life with different priorities.

As we become disciples, we are expected to give up our possessions,
or more succinctly, our need to possess:

the urge to acquire, the yearning for success, our petty jealousies,
our unfounded stereotypes of others, our prejudices.

All those things that hold our attention and distract us
from the Christlike walk we are called to.

This was a passage that resonated with Reformation theologian John Calvin.

Calvin proposed that the Christian life should be understood
from a few basic implications of Jesus' teaching.

The first implication he identifies as self-denial.

For Calvin, self-denial did not mean the embrace or enjoyment
of self-destructive tendencies.

He saw self-denial as the way
that Jesus offers us freedom from selfishness and, as he put it,
the 'deadly pestilence of strife and love of self.'

Self-denial is the gift Christ gives us
that enables us to dedicate ourselves to God
and to seek the things which are of God's will.

The person who fails to deny themselves is not able to love God or
neighbor,

but self-denial leads to the very positive affirmation
of the power of love in human relationships of God and neighbor.

His second insight, cross bearing,

is for us the dimension of self-denial that enables us to face suffering.

To bear our cross means to obey God even in our pain and loss,
in facing the tragedies, trials and griefs of life.

The image of the cross of Christ appeals to the Christian imagination
to elicit our patience in bearing pain.

Calvin teaches that the cross of Christ is healing medicine
for the diseases and injuries of life,
punishment and correction for our mistakes in life, and above all,
comfort when we are persecuted
because we stand with God's justice.

So according to Calvin,

the cross of Christ brings us cheer,
honesty to acknowledge our hurt,
and a freedom from bitterness.

Finally, when Calvin interprets Jesus' call to self-denial and cross bearing,
he finds reliable foundation

for our *proper use of the gifts of God in daily life.*

Scripture teaches us "the right use of earthly benefits,"
both things of necessity, or needs,
and things of delight, or pleasures.

Calvin counsels a simplicity of life

in which we understand ourselves to be

on an earthly pilgrimage toward home.

We become free from both undue severity and from excessive indulgence.

We seek only that which we need,

and do not seek after that which we do not need.

The resources we are blessed with by circumstance

we share as others need and with Calvin's perspective,

which is not unlike the Brethren mindset,

we will be patient when we find ourselves wanting.

If we are blessed with what we need,

Jesus isn't implying that we give it all away

and leave ourselves destitute.

Then we would willingly become a burden and worry for others.

His implication is to reset our priorities away

from trying to keep up with the selfish standards of success the world has to offer

and orient them towards looking at the others around us,

through the lens of Christ's love for all.

The housing and economic crises experienced by so many,

particularly in our own backyard in Seattle;

the damage to the earth by our addiction to fossil fuels;

and the hunger, poverty, and pandemics suffered by people

in all parts of the world

are certainly calling us in the church

to give Jesus' call to costly discipleship a new lease on life.

Which brings us back to our original question. What is your cost?

Life meets almost everyone with choices that are emotionally costly.

Which brings us to the question of our relationship with our family.

Jesus is not saying we abandon our families

but that our families now include all

who are on this discipleship journey together.

We don't avoid risk to our blood family at the expense of our family of faith.

We're all in this together.

But sometimes our loyalties are tested

and we feel competition for our attention and affection.

Along with family, one often has ties

to their livelihood, community, their country, their flag and their church,
among others, and God.

Usually one can keep various loyalties and obligations in balance,

but sometimes interests come into conflict.

Should one salute the flag and keep the mouth shut

when that flag flies over terrible injustice?

Should one keep quiet when family members

stand for beliefs and practices

that fly in opposition to Christ's teachings

just to keep the peace,
to not make family gatherings uncomfortable?

Should one just devote an hour and commute time on Sunday to God,
then not inconvenience ourselves
in time and effort the rest of the week?

Is your cost high enough?

In a country that separates children from parents and puts them in cages,
is typing a comment or sharing articles on social media enough?

In a city with affordable housing in short supply
and homelessness at epidemic levels,
is watching the news, or maybe writing an email
or making a donation enough?

With all that going on, is this hour on Sunday all that this body is called to,
is this our cost?

I think Jesus is saying pretty clearly today that we need to step out of our comfort zone,
that this faith has a real, tangible cost.

If you go about your routine and your faith causes you no inconvenience,
then it's time to reexamine your faith walk.

Carrying a cross entails bearing some weight doesn't it?

But that's also the beauty of a family that extends beyond bloodlines.

We can help each other bear the load.

But when only half try to carry the load, that cross doesn't travel very far.

So my question for you this week is, how can you increase your cost?

What more can you do to be a prophetic witness for Christ?

How can you make your life less convenient as a follower of Christ?

And what more can you do to further the work of his body in this world?

I pray you count the cost, and that the cost that is counted is enough. Amen.