

## Don't Give it a Try

### **Luke 14:25-33**

Now large crowds were traveling with him; and he turned and said to them, "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

I hate shopping. I usually know exactly what I'm looking for, which means that probably no one makes it. It doesn't exist the way I'm looking for it. So I get frustrated. I get tired. I get overwhelmed by the prices and the options and the materialism. For me, most of the time, it's just easier to do my shopping online. Going from store to store to store doesn't really zap your energy that way. And when I get frustrated, I don't have to drive home. I can just turn away from the computer. This works well for books and toys and furnace filters. But buying clothes can be tricky. Sizing isn't the same from one store to the next. It's hard to accurately portray the exact color of some garments. Unless I know a store well, if I'm buying clothes, I want to be able to try them on.

Of course, shopping isn't the only place I like to give things a try. When I was growing up, my parents encouraged us to always try things before deciding if we liked them or not. This applied to sports, food, and even friends. We were expected to give everything a fair try. But there are some things in life that you can't really try. You either do them or don't, because there's no way to really go into them half-heartedly. You can try on a sweater and decide if it's comfortable, but you can't try on a tattoo and then decide that it's not really your style. You can't try pregnancy or parenthood out for a few months before making a final decision on whether this

is what you want for your life. And the same thing goes for following Jesus. Discipleship is not something to be undertaken with an attitude of “let’s try it for a while and see how it goes.”

Sometimes, you have to be fully committed right from the start. And that’s what Jesus is talking about morning. He offers two examples – one from construction and one from military engagement. Who in their right mind would undertake a massive construction project without first checking to see if they had the money to complete the project? Half a tower provides your neighbors with good gossip material, but it doesn’t provide you the necessary security for your crops. And who would go to war if they didn’t think they had at least a reasonable chance of winning? It’s just a no-brainer. Before we make major decisions, we have to calculate the cost. Are the risks worth the reward? Do we have what it takes to follow through?

Jesus is inviting the crowd to consider these questions this morning, not in regard to construction or war, but in regard to following him. When Jesus starts mentioning the costs of following him, he uses some pretty strong language. Jesus says we have to hate our families. We have to hate our own lives. Remember, this is the same guy who told us to love our enemies. So right off the bat, we know that Jesus doesn’t really mean we should hate our parents or our children. At least, not in the sense that we mean when we use the word hate.

It turns out, although this is a good translation from the Greek, Jesus was speaking in Aramaic. And in Aramaic, there wasn’t a good translation into Greek. The word Jesus used was not a violent word of emotion, but was more a description of a way of being. We might use the word ‘detach’ as a better translation. Detach from your mother and your father. Detach from your sister, your brother and your children. I don’t know about you, but as long as Jesus was telling me to hate anything, I was having a hard time even listening to the rest of what he was saying.

But even if we soften the language that Jesus was using here, this is still a challenging passage. Jesus doesn't want us to hate our families or our lives, but Jesus wants us to be willing to give them up, just as he wants us to be willing to give up our possessions. You know, Jesus talks a lot about money in the Bible. The thing he talks about most is the Kingdom of Heaven. But after that, money is a close second. And every time he says something like "sell everything you own and give the money to the poor," we squirm a little bit. We might be willing to sell some of the things we own. We might be willing to give money to the poor. But we're just not ready to get rid of ALL our possessions. So who would've thought that was the easiest thing Jesus would ask of us in this passage?!?

Jesus also asks us to be willing to give up our lives. And that's a really demanding request. But for us gathered here this morning, in Waunakee in 2010, it just doesn't seem all that realistic. I may have to make sacrifices in order to fully follow Jesus. But I don't honestly expect that I will have to sacrifice my life. I mean, maybe if Wisconsin were suddenly overrun and occupied by an anti-Christian government things would be different. Many of Jesus' first disciples were in fact put to death for their beliefs and their actions of carrying on the church. In countries today that do not protect the freedom of religion, some Christians find themselves having to choose between denouncing their faith or suffering physical harm or even death. In some areas of India, nuns refuse to wear their habits, because it actually attracts more danger. Jesus wasn't saying that in order to be Christian you have to find a way to become a martyr. Not even close. But Jesus lays out the warning clearly. Following him is a dangerous path.

But for my money, the hardest thing Jesus asks us to do in this passage is to give up our families. I mean, you've got to be kidding, right? What about the fifth commandment: honor your father and mother? This is one of those rare times when our culture can really understand

the culture to which Jesus was speaking. 'Family' is an important institution in America, one that is almost revered. Families are all different, composed of different people and relationships. And no family is perfect. But the idea of family, the very concept, is central to our self-understanding in this country. The same was true for the early Israelites. For them, family was critical for the way it shaped not only relationships, but also economic realities. It would have been outrageous for Jesus to suggest that he should be more important than caring for your family.

But there's really no way around Jesus' radical message this morning. These aren't things that are easy to do. These aren't things we can do if we are less than 100% committed. We can't dabble in Christianity, because Jesus asks for our whole hearts. Anyone who sets out to follow Jesus with the mentality of, "well, I'll give it a try," is bound to fail. Because they already lack the necessary commitment.

In the Star Wars movie *The Empire Strikes Back*, Luke Skywalker crashes his ship into a bog on the planet where he meets Yoda. Luke gets some basic training in how to use The Force, including how to move stones using just his mind. Then Yoda asks him to get his ship out of the bog. Understandably, Luke resists. Moving stones around is one thing, but this is totally different. Yoda tells him he must unlearn what he has learned. In other words, he must unlearn the things he thinks are impossible. Luke shrugs his shoulders and says, "I'll give it a try." But instead of making Yoda happy, this angers him. "No! Try not. Do, or do not. There is no try."

I hate to compare Jesus to Yoda, but they are working with the same principle. When we set out only to try, not to do, we have a different mindset. We're not as committed. It means we often don't put in quite 100% of our effort. And so from the outset, we're more likely to fail.

Dan Dick, Director of Connectional Ministries for the Wisconsin Conference, puts it this way:

Jesus didn't make discipleship easy. As described in the Christian scriptures, Jesus taught that the Christian life is one fraught with sacrifice, peril, discomfort, and the risk of death. He also indicated deep satisfaction, fulfillment, and a killer retirement plan, but there was nothing simple or easy about being Christian. It impacts lifestyle, values, practices, and vocation. In short, Christians must work at being Christian, devoting some significant time to learning, practicing, serving, and sweating.

Being a faithful follower of Christ takes effort. It takes time. It takes discipline. And if we're going to be any good at it, we have to give it the necessary energy and time it deserves. And that means we have to put God first in our lives. You can choose to put your family, or your life, or your possessions first, but then you put God second at best. And if we put God second, we'll never have enough of ourselves left to devote to God.

Basically, it comes down to this. Life is full of choices. Jesus essentially tells us, "If you want to be my disciples, then make a commitment to me. Don't tell me that you're busy. If you want to be committed to something else, then go and devote yourself to it. But if you're going to be my follower, then be prepared to go all the way." Amen and amen.