

What does it Cost to Follow Jesus?

This is a very difficult Gospel reading this morning. Yes we hear how much God loves us through the analogy of the sparrows. If God knows and counts for all the sparrows how much more will he know and count for us as human beings. But interspersed in this teaching of Jesus are these challenging things that he says. Challenging in the sense that they require a big commitment on our part. What is to be expected of us? How much does this free gift of salvation cost, and how much do we pay?

Jesus mentions four dimensions of the cost of following him, which I will call the three, D's, Division, Decision, Determination, and then concludes with the reward for following him which I will call Discovery.

vv. 35-36 "For I have come to turn 'a son against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.'"

Here is the prophetic quote in our passage this morning and it is a strange one. Jesus reaches back to the prophecy of Micah to a passage speaking about a time when the people have fallen away from the Lord, when religion was given a bad name, a time when you could trust no one even those whom you have trusted in the past. This is not the message we would expect because we expect Jesus to bring a message of love and peace. The Apostle Paul said the message is a stumbling block. Because although the Gospel is good news it is preceded by some very bad news, the News that we are all sinful and need a savior. You see the need for a savior isn't always a popular thought. For me to accept a savior I must confess my own moral bankruptcy. And there is something in the human spirit that is rankled by that thought, there is

something within us that wants a God who affirms that we are good enough as we are, a God who will say, your life balances to the good. But here Jesus doesn't say that, He says your life is messed up and you can't fix it, so I'll fix it for you.

Many of us and many around us don't believe that anything is wrong and they certainly don't need Jesus to fix it for them. For those of us who have accepted Jesus into our lives have realized that we need help and this makes some people uncomfortable. Jesus said that this division would happen and we need to understand that it's not because we're doing it wrong but because we're doing it right. Part of the cost of discipleship is division. Another dimension of the cost of discipleship is that it forces you to make a...Decision

v. 37 "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."

Here the point is not just that your choice to follow Jesus causes you to pull away from your loves ones but that you must make a priority choice between Jesus and those people and the things that you care about.

This is the Abraham test. You remember the story of Abraham of the Old Testament who wanted so very much to have a son. No matter how hard they tried his wife Sarah and Abraham were childless and to add to the problem they were also too old to have children. But God promised Abraham that one day he would have a son and finally he did. Then God called upon Abraham to sacrifice, that is kill, his son. Despite Abraham's incredible love for his son, he was willing to do what God required. Just before Abraham was to kill Isaac God told him that he didn't have to go through with it. God calls on us to make a decision about the priorities in our life that places him first. Above career, above comfort, above our personal hopes and dreams, above, yes, even father and mother, son and daughter.

Now does that mean that we're being called to neglect family responsibility in the name

of spirituality? No of course not. Caring for and loving your family is part of your service to the Lord, but it cannot and must not ever take priority over your love and dedication to Him.

How does that work out practically? Here's one way, Often when I speak with folks who call themselves Christian I ask, "Where do you worship?" and I'll get a variation of this response, "Well we're so busy that when we have any time we just want to spend it with each other."

The cost of discipleship calls for a decision, but it also requires determination.

Vs. 38"...and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me."

Wow that's tough! The cross was an instrument of torture. Jesus was being politically incorrect for even mentioning it, because Jews at this time refused to speak of crucifixion in polite company--it was considered an obscenity. Here is Jesus not only talking about it, but also saying if you want to follow him you have to carry a cross. To make it contemporary imagine some guy on the street calling for people to pick up an electric chair and follow him. Not the greatest selling point for your new religion. But Jesus says if you're going to follow me, it's going to take that kind of Determination. A willingness to follow whatever the cost.

There is a story I read about a career day school assembly where the school had invited the Army, Air Force and Marine recruiters to give their pitch to the student body. The first two went over time and the Marine had only two minutes to speak. He stood and stared at the students and finally said, "I doubt if there's more than three of you here who could even make it in the Marines, but I want to see those three at my table." You know what happened--his table was surrounded. Jesus is saying the same thing about being His follower. It's not going to be easy, no wimps allowed. It's going to take determination. Even though Christ paid for our salvation with His own blood and it's a free gift that we can't add anything too, he makes it clear that it will cost us something, that something is nothing more and nothing less than our lives.

Why would that appeal to anybody? For the same reason the Marine recruiter had such success, we all understand deep down that anything worthwhile costs us something. We understand that difficult things have great rewards. That reward is the last thing that I would like to look at with you. The reward of following Jesus is...Discovery

v. 39 "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." If we attempt to hold on to our lives we find that we cannot, but if we will surrender our lives to Him we will discover real life.

Jesus uses marriage as a metaphor of our relationship to Him, and there is a similarity at this point. No matter how many jokes you hear about giving up your freedom when you get married, anyone who has experienced marriage the way it ought to be understands that whatever surrender there is to make a relationship work is dwarfed by the fulfillment and magic of two becoming one.

Life without Jesus is shallow and empty. When we give our lives to him our heart finds its true home. We were created to be in relationship with Him. When we surrender to him our life's purpose is fulfilled. We have life and more abundantly--real life, life the way it's supposed to be. So by giving ourselves to him we don't lose our life but find real life. That is the reward of following him. **Amen**