



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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September 12, 2010
16th Sunday after Pentecost
Sermon Text: [Luke 14:25-27](#)
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Genesis 12:1-8](#)
Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 19](#)
Second Lesson: [Philippians 3:4b-11](#)
Gospel Lesson: [Luke 14:25-33](#)

Count the Personal Cost of Discipleship

Carry Your Cross
Follow Jesus Personally

In the Book of Psalms it says “no man can redeem the life of another, the cost is too great, no payment is ever enough” ([Psalm 49:7-8](#)). That’s why we had to have God live and die in our place. I suppose there are some corollary truths to that. As much as you might want to, as much as you are torn up by the fact that someone you love does not believe in Christ, you can’t believe for them. As much as you are worried that someone you love is drifting away from Christ, you can’t grow in faith for them. And as much as you might want to and try to, you can’t live faith in Christ for someone else.

That’s why our Savior comes to us in these words from Luke and tells us to count the personal cost of discipleship because discipleship is personal. It’s my cross that I have to pick up and carry as I follow Christ. It’s your cross that you have to pick up and carry as you follow Christ. We can encourage one another along the way, but you and I can’t believe for anyone else. We can’t grow in faith for anyone else. And we can’t live the faith for anyone else.

We don’t always remember that, do we? This personal nature of following Christ...we spend an awful lot of time worrying about how other people at times are carrying or not carrying their cross or living for and serving their God. We go to meetings, like voter’s meetings, and I’ll hear people say, “Boy, it’s too bad more people weren’t there.” Or we’ll have some kind of effort where we’re volunteering our time and energy to serve our Lord and his people, and we get done and we’ll say, “Boy, it’s too bad there weren’t more people here doing this or doing that.” We seem to want to spend an awful lot of time telling someone else how they should be carrying their cross and not counting that cost for ourselves. We want more volunteers. “I volunteer you” seems to be how it goes.

Here’s what I hear about our financial situation...“If all those people that aren’t giving anything would just give more, then we wouldn’t have a problem.” I have yet to hear anyone come out and say, “If I would just examine how God has loved me and I would respond to that love more fully and more faithfully, I would be doing more.” I don’t hear the personal pronoun “I.” I hear a lot of “they” and “them” and “they should be doing this” or “they should be doing that.”

Jesus says here, "If you are going to come after me, you have to get over looking at everyone else. You have to not love anyone else more than you love me." He says it in hyperbole, "You've got to hate your mother and father, your brother, your sister, your children." If it's going to be following Christ or letting them come in front of it, he says your attitude should be the same as what he said toward Peter. Do you think he loved Peter when he said "Get behind me Satan"? You bet he did. But he didn't want that to trip up his carrying out his Father's will.

So for you and I...we've got to focus on how we respond. If we're letting something else trip us up, then we have to set it aside. We have to recognize that the most important thing in our lives is Jesus, his life and his death in our place. Nothing else takes away our sin. Nothing else makes us able to stand before God and say "God, I am your child." Our picking up our cross and carrying it doesn't make us his child, but because he loved us first and took away our sins, we want to pick up our cross and carry our cross and be concerned that we grow closer and closer to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

This is what our Savior is really talking about when he talks about the paragraphs in the Gospel that I didn't read for the Sermon text. When he's talking about counting the costs and building the tower, when he's talking about going and fighting the war, he's saying you have to recognize what your resources are. If you or I are going to look at ourselves as our resource, we're in trouble. If you and I are going to be so busy worrying about what someone else is doing that our eyes are taken off of Christ, we are in trouble. We are called to follow Christ and follow him closely and be connected to him, as we just talked about this morning. He is the vine. We are the branches. If you disconnect from the vine, the branch shrivels up and dies. That's why he says "Pick up your cross and follow me."

As we are connected to Christ, there will be difficulties that come into our life. They might come into our life because of the fact that we live in a sinful world and with sin in the world, there's going to be things that are burdens that we have to carry. It might be facing difficulties in this world with health, or with relationships, or with finances. We might have our cross that we have to carry and say "How am I going to get through this?" Our Lord is telling us that the way to get through it is to be close to him and rely on his strength. If you are going to face 10,000-20,000, you are going to get your tail kicked. If you are going to try to face life's challenges with just yourself, you are going to get your tail kicked. You need to rely on your source of strength...which is Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone.

This is the cost of discipleship...being intimately and closely and permanently connected to Jesus Christ, not just connected intermittently or not just connected here and there and what not. He says "I demand that your whole life be devoted to me." Not just church time. Not just volunteer at church or school time. Every last minute of every last day. Every last thought of every last minute of every last day. When you and I see that demand, you see that sometimes the cross that we carry is our own failings. We have failed our God. We haven't loved him perfectly. We haven't loved each other

perfectly. The only thing we come close to loving perfectly is ourselves, and then we don't even always do that, right?

We have failed him. The cross that we have to carry is sometimes our own guilt. And our God says, "If you are going to try to carry that alone, you're like 10,000 going out against 20,000. You bring it to me and take it to my cross and know that I lived perfectly in your place. In every last area of your life where you have failed me, I was perfect. I carried every last one of your sins to the cross and took away every one of those sins." That's where we find our strength. If we are going to take up our cross, he's telling us, "Make sure you count the cost and you put me in your back pocket, because I am your strength...you're only strength."

So then the question comes...how do we put him in our back pocket? How do we follow him. He says "Pick up your cross and follow me." You yourself, you have to follow him. You can't have someone else follow him for you. You can't follow him for someone else. So how do you as an individual follow Christ? How do you get close to him?

Nine times out of ten, if I ask someone how they want to get close to God, they'll tell me "pray." I'm telling you the way you get close to God is listening to him talk. You can talk to him about what he says to you, but listen to him talk first. As he talks to us in his Word, that's how we follow him. That's how we get closer to him. That's how we stay connected to him. When Jesus talked about the vine and the branches, he said "If my word remains in you." He talks about his Gospel being a part of us, every part of us, not just segmented to certain segments of our life.

So the cost of being a disciple is being really close to God in Word and Sacrament, knowing him better, knowing him more fully, knowing him more closely. Where do you do that? I suppose it's right here...do you know what this is? This is a Bible. But it's a very special Bible. Does anyone know what this Bible might be? I think our 7th and 8th Graders know what this Bible might be.

In 7th and 8th Grade in our Christian day school, when I go down to Confirmation Class, we look up passages and talk about different things about Jesus and God so we get to know him better. As we look up the passage in the book of the Bible, I've been asking the kids, "Hey, have you read this whole book?" When they say "no," I take the pages and rip it out and say, "This isn't in your Bible then." We had done that for the first week. Finally I got tired of doing it and I said, "Okay, just tell me. Which books of the Bible have you read so we can get to the end of this? Which books of the Bible have you read?" There are 16 in the class this year. I think there were 6 or 7 that said they had read Genesis. A couple had read Matthew. A couple had read Revelation. One had read Job. There might have been some other book in there some place. I said, "Okay, I'll give you Genesis. It's not quite half of you, but I'll give you Genesis." So this is what their Bible looks like. It's got the Book of Genesis in it.

You say that isn't fair! They've read other parts of the Bible, right? They've read here and there. They look up passages. They've looked up passages in just about every

book of the Bible as I teach them. So let me put it to you this way...if your loved one, your spouse, your mother, your father, your son, your daughter is over at war and they write you a letter telling you how they miss you and how they love you, are you going to read every fifth word, every third paragraph? Or are you going to pour over every last word of that letter just longing to hear what's in their heart? Isn't this God's love letter to you? Just reading a bit of it here and a bit of it there, while that's good, I'm not saying don't do that, but isn't there a part of us that, like the Psalmist says, hungers and thirsts for his Word? And if we want to follow him, if we want to be able to carry that cross, and at times that cross is going to be awfully stinking heavy, don't we want all of his help? So getting to know him better and better and better is our goal.

I'm not doing this to pick on our 7th and 8th Graders. This is just who I talk to three days a week. My question to you would be, how big is your Bible? That's what is going to help you carry your cross, right? I can't carry it for you. The person sitting next to you can't carry it for you. God can help carry it for you, but he does it the more you know him, right?

We talked about it this morning in our Bible class. We talked about seeking time from our Lord. I thought it was kind of an interesting class. One of the statements that was made in this class was that if we as a congregation recognize that our biggest challenge isn't paying off debt, it isn't filling up Bible classes, it isn't running a school of excellence, it's being close to Jesus, and that if each and every member got closer to Jesus tomorrow than they are today, and closer the day after that than they are tomorrow, and closer the day after that, within a year's time I don't think we'd be looking at some of the problems we're looking at right now. If we'd recommit to following Jesus individually, personally and passionately, the Lord God will pick up our congregational cross and carry it.

So, rejoice that for all the times you have failed to follow him closely, he's given you his very body and blood to take away your sins. Be renewed that he has taken away that sin. Then in response to that love, get closer to him. You won't be disappointed.