



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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September 8, 2013

Pentecost 16

Sermon Text: [Genesis 12:1-8](#)

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](#)

The Believer Hears Jesus' Warnings Count the Cost of Discipleship

Counting is a pretty simple thing. We learn to count early on. Even Americans who don't seem to like to learn second languages probably can count at least to three in a number of different languages, whether you know the language or not. We think counting is pretty simple.

So when you hear Jesus warning to count the cost of discipleship, counting isn't that hard. But then you think a little bit more about some of those examples that Jesus used this morning in our Gospel when he urges us to count the cost of discipleship, and maybe you get the idea that it isn't quite as simple as we think. If anyone is going to set out to build something, won't they count the cost to see whether or not they can finish it? Or if you look at our society today, and you look at the amount of debt people take on for school, for mansions or whatever else the case might be, you see that we don't necessarily as a society view it as that person's fault for borrowing too much. As a society, we tend to say the bank shouldn't have lent that much, right? We've kind of gone in the other direction in blaming the person that lent the money instead of the person not counting the cost to see if they could afford it within a certain amount of risk.

If we start taking that approach in our walk with God and we don't count the cost and think about what it is that God is asking me to do once I am his own, if we just say, "God will love me. He'll forgive me no matter what I do, so I'm going to do whatever I want, because it's all about me." The Savior is telling us we are really doing something stupid and we should knock it off. We should think about what it means to be a disciple of Christ, what it means to follow him, what it means to say what is important to him is important to me and we should learn to listen to his warnings, which really involves all of them putting off our wants and putting on God's wants.

So as we think about the life of Abraham, you really see how Abraham counted the cost of discipleship. When you stop and think about it, instead of just reading the words and letting them pass by your eyes and you stop and think about what Abraham did, it's amazing. It's amazing! Most of the women here probably think it's natural for a guy to get up and go some place without directions. That's what they think we do all the time, right? But God told Abraham, "Get up and go to a land I will show you. I'm not even going to tell you where you're moving to."

When our verse starts, he's in Haran. That's way to the north of the Land of Israel, the Promised Land. He moved up there from Ur of the Chaldeans, which was down in the breadbasket of the world at that time, in between the Tigris and Euphrates. It was good land. Things were good. And when you read about Abraham, you get the idea that they were probably doing pretty well there because he seems to be a really good businessman. But when they were living there in Ur of the Chaldeans, God came to him and said to him, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you."

So he went, and he lived in Haran for awhile and brought together a pretty big household of servants and different things and herds and flocks and what not. Things were going pretty good there. Now God comes to him again and says, "Now you're going to go to another land I'm going to show you. You are going to leave this one behind." Leave behind your people, your father's household, and your country? That's an amazing thing, isn't it?

Why in the world would Abraham say, "Okay, go to some place when I don't know where I'm going. Leave behind everyone I've known. Leave behind this good business and go do something else? Okay. Sure. You bet. Yes sir. Let's go." It's amazing when you stop and think about it, isn't it? He counted the cost and said "Yes." I think most of us would think Abraham had been eating funny mushrooms or had fallen and hit his head or something, right? To go and do that? It's odd.

Then you look at when he gets to the land and he counts the cost of discipleship. It says when he finally gets to the land, this 75-year-old guy gets to the land, God comes to him. As he is in that land, he looks around and there the Canaanites, with their fortified cities, and they possess the land, and he says, "Go to the land I'll show you. I'm going to give it to you. To your offspring I will give this land." Imagine that...to your offspring I'll give this land because this 75-year-old guy had no kids with his wife, Sarah, right? "To your offspring I'll give this land." How would you like to count the cost of that statement God spoke? Isn't that kind of like salt in the wounds? Isn't that like saying, "God? What are you talking about? I have no kids? And it kind of hurts. Would you quit talking about it? You're going to give me this land? Didn't you look around? Look at the Canaanites. They're everywhere. They have fortified cities. They look pretty strong, and you're going to give me this land?" If you are going to count the cost of that statement, again you are going to be shaking your head at what God says.

But look what Abraham does. In the middle of the land are these Canaanites. He builds an altar to the Lord and calls on the name of the Lord. That doesn't mean he bowed his head and silently prayed. To call on the name of the Lord in this phrase really means to proclaim him to anybody that heard him. He talked about the promises, who God is, what God had promised him. Here he is counting the cost of discipleship and saying "I'm going to put my neck on the line because I'm going to speak out about you, not any of the gods of the Canaanites, not any of the gods of the people in the area. I'm going to talk about the one true God, and I'm going to call on his name and make an altar to him so everyone knows who the true God is and who the Lord is." He

called on the name of the Lord, the God of the Covenant, the God of grace, the God that keeps his promises.

Then he goes to another place and builds another altar and calls on the name of the Lord. Abram counts the cost of discipleship and says, "I'm going to do what God wants me to do." So you have to stop and ask yourself why. Why in the world would Abraham do this? Why would he believe these promises from God, because he was seeing no evidence of them. Why would he put himself on the line and call on the name of the Lord in the middle of a hostile land? It'd be kind of like if God called on you to go set up tent ministry in Afghanistan tomorrow. You go in the middle of those Taliban folks and you tell them they're all going to hell because they don't believe in the one true God. Any of you want to pack your bags?

I'm amazed at what Abraham did. Why he did it? If you look at the part of the text that I haven't talked about yet in your Bulletin, it becomes kind of clear why he did it. Sometimes I think in our society we aren't that good at counting the cost because we look for a voice within. If you listen to Evangelical radio or read Evangelical books, I've been reading a couple lately, one of the things it keeps talking about is that you have to open yourself up to hear what God is going to say to you as you pray about what you should do, and God will talk to you. God will reveal to you what you need to know and what you need to do. I kind of think that misses the point. If we're just looking at something to be the voice within, quite often that's going to be my desires and my wants telling me what "God wants me to do."

If you want to know what God wants and what God expects and where God thinks we're going to find the strength to do it, you don't look inside yourself and examine your belly button lint. You look into the certain Word of God. Isn't that exactly what Abraham did?

God had come to him and had said, "Go to the land I will show you," but that isn't all. He had said, when he was living in Ur of the Chaldeans, the breadbasket of the world, "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you. I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse, and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." Those were the promises God made to Abram, and Abram believed them. He believed that God would make him into a great nation even though he had no offspring. He believed God would make him prosper and already in Haran he saw how God did that as he increased his wealth and no doubt also increased his spiritual wealth, his trust in God. "I will make your name great." We are still talking about him today, what is it, 4,000 years later.

"And you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you, I will curse." As he went around calling on the name of the Lord, he was a blessing to the people that heard it. If they blessed him for this message, they were blessed by God with the gift of faith. If they cursed him for that message and rejected that message as he functioned as a prophet and spoke about God and talked about God, God would curse them.

But “You will be a blessing” also hints at the most important promise of God. “All nations on earth will be blessed through you. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” That was God’s promise of a Savior to come through the line of Abraham. That was the promise he hung and clung to later even when God said to him, “Go and take your son, your only son, the son whom you love, and sacrifice him to me.” God had promised the Messiah would come through him, so Abraham came to the conclusion, “Even if I kill him, God is going to raise him from the dead.” Abraham hung his counting the cost of discipleship not on his own thoughts, his own feelings, his own voice within, it was on the voice of God that had come and spoken to him.

The voice of God still speaks to us. Quite often the things we worry and stress and fret about, God has already told us in Scripture the answer to some of our worries. He’s told us he’s with us always. He tells us again and again in Scripture things about himself, things about us. When you stop and think and look at it, it becomes an amazing thing to consider. When you read Scripture and you see how much God does not like sin, he hates sin and he says even in Scripture, “I hate sinners.” Yet you see how he loves at the same time and punished Jesus in our place and doesn’t punish us. That’s why we want to count the cost of discipleship and live for him because he loves us with such a perfect love and he has taken away our sins, and he has given us a promised land that far exceeds the land of Israel. He told us heaven is ours. Now we are just passing time until he takes us there.

As we pass that time, we are going to face difficulties. We are going to face challenges. We are going to face hardships. We are going to face heartache. Satan is going to want to use them to lead us to count the cost of discipleship and say, “It isn’t worth following Jesus. He isn’t doing anything for you. Do what you want, when you want, how you want because God seems to be hidden.”

It’s at that point in time that you need to be in the Word of God and listening to what God says and seeing his promises and his actions on your behalf that began long before you were born. When you see that and when you rejoice in it, the cost of saying, “I’m not going to do what everyone else is doing because I’m going to live for God, or I’m going to put myself on the line and talk about my faith because I am concerned and want people to be in heaven with me” becomes not a burden. It becomes a literal joy.

You know the message of the Gospel. You know who Jesus is. You know what he did. You know what you are. You know your sins, the sins others can see and the sins others cannot see. You know that he loves you in spite of those sins. Are you going to count the cost of discipleship and say, “Lord, it just isn’t worth doing what you want. I’m going to do what I want.” Or are you going to say, “Lord, forgive my selfishness and help me to live for you.” Amen.