

25Now large crowds were traveling with him; and he turned and said to them, 26“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. 27Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. 28For 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? 29Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, 30saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ 31Or 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? 32If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. 33So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

In 2002 Sue and I went to visit Marla Wood who was serving as a missionary in Tokyo, Japan. On the second Sunday we were there Marla arranged for me to preach at Tonan Lutheran Church. From early morning to well into the evening we were with the people of that congregation – after worship we were the honored guests at a dinner at the church and in the evening many from the church gathered in a home for a meal prepared for us. In between many traveled with us to show us a few of the sights of Tokyo. And so we had lots of time to get acquainted – asking about jobs and family and where they lived. I remember one woman telling about her husband who was not a Christian. He did not like it that she came to church on her only day off work and that she often was at church most of the day. Each week she had to decide between keeping him happy or doing what Jesus wanted her to do.

When I grew up most everyone I knew went to church on Sundays. Stores were closed, Little League was never scheduled on Sunday. But by the time Sue and I had children things had changed. I remember the first Sunday morning when Sue and the kids were out of town at a swim meet while I was conducting worship. Matt was 8 – this was his first state swim championship. In those days in North Dakota Sunday morning swim meets always began with

a short time for worship – a pastor, usually Lutheran would come to the pool and read scripture and comment on the reading, lead the group in prayer and then the swimming would begin. I do not think that worship was really about honoring God so much as it was about helping people feel that they had taken care of their obligation to worship. Sue and I could have decided that swim meets on Sunday mornings were out of bounds but we did not.

When large crowds were traveling with Jesus he said, “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.”

Who do you think was a disciple of Jesus, the woman who sacrificed peace at home or the preacher that sent his family off to the swim meet?

Fast forward twenty-eight years. Soccer, softball, cheerleading, hockey, basketball, dance and so much more have invaded Sunday mornings. Some of the children are brought to church only once in a while. Even our most active children miss a lot. Now everything is open on Sundays – families are busy doing the things that keep the kids happy. And Jesus? Most of the kids on the street do not know much about Jesus.

Jesus said to count the cost of following him – he warned of the builder who could not complete the project – the king whose army was too small to win the battle. Jesus says that the cost of following him is very high – he said, “None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.” Why that even rules out the woman in Tokyo – she still had a house.

The day Jesus spoke these words to that large crowd what do you think happened? Did they go back to their mothers and fathers and wives and children and brothers and sisters and leave Jesus forever?

Luke tells us this about the first Christians: All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all as any had need.” Those first Christians became part of a new family, Jesus’ family and their new family received all that they had.

Well at least we came to church today. Some of us will be giving 10% or more of what we received as income this week. A few of us have left family members at home. Surely our sacrifices should count for something. So why

do Jesus words discourage me so? Because Jesus is not satisfied with ten percent. Jesus does not want to take second or third place in my priorities behind Sue and my children. Jesus wants to be first with you and with me – more important to us than anything else. And in my life and my choices he has not been. I would like to tell you that tomorrow Jesus will be. I know that my life would be better if Jesus were first. I know that I would have such an interesting adventure if I let go of stuff and trusted in Jesus for tomorrow. But when I count the cost I know that I do not have enough faith and love for Jesus to be a worthy disciple, not enough courage to trust that today is in his hands.

There is a reason Jesus gave his life for you and for me – if we were going to be his he had to. He entered death so that his love for us would never have to die. Sometimes I fool myself about this – thinking that I deserve something good from Jesus for all the sacrifices I have made. But I do not. My being here today does not count for anything with Jesus – my offerings do not earn me his love. Everything I have from Jesus, everything I will ever have from Jesus is a gift. The same was true for that large crowd following him that day. The same is true for you.

But what a gift it is to be loved by Jesus, to be treasured by Jesus even more than he treasured his own life. He is the one who carried a cross for you, died on that cross, gave up not only possessions but life itself for you.

Aren't you glad you came here to say thanks to him today? Aren't you glad that sometimes you have put him first? Aren't you glad for every time you have given an offering out of love and gratitude for him?

I am. Amen.

