

*5Now 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.*

Welcome to Christ Lutheran. I'm your tour guide here. We all want you to have a marvelous stay. We will provide music for your enjoyment, food for your spiritual refreshment, people to listen to you, care about you, visit you. We want you to know that God is on your side. God accepts you, wants all the best for you. If you sin, forget about it, God has. If you get sick pray and expect something good to happen. We will help you with your children, or your aging parents. Happiness is what you can expect, isn't that what God wants for you?

We will never say no to you here, never ask more of you than you can comfortably give, because this church is about you. We know that you have made yourself the center of your life, we intend to keep things just that way.

*(At this point a member of the congregation, Paul, comes to the front and engages the pastor in the following dialogue.)*

*Paul:* Pastor, I'm kind of confused. What did Jesus mean when 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”?

*Pastor:* Paul, this is one of those passages we do best to understand spiritually. We say to ourselves, "If it ever came to the point that I would need to choose between someone I love and Jesus, I would choose Jesus." But since we know that that decision will never come to us, thinking that we would choose Jesus is enough.

*Paul:* But that is not what Jesus said. He said that if we want to come to him we must hate family, even life itself.

*Pastor:* Paul, that just sounds too negative, it won't sell with people. We all want Jesus to be most concerned about our happiness. Surely my happiness is the most important thing in the world to God. Don't you think so Paul?

*Paul:* Tell me, what did Jesus mean, "whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple"?

*Pastor:* That one is easy. You've seen my cross, when I'm not wearing a chasuble I wear it right here, hanging from my neck.

*Paul:* I don't think Jesus was talking about jewelry. Crosses were used for torturing, not for decorating. Bearing the cross is the same as hating life itself, letting nothing stand in the way of Jesus even if it means my suffering.

*Pastor:* Heaven forbid! God would never allow someone God loves to suffer. What would be the point of believing in God if it did not keep us from suffering?

*Paul:* What about Jesus? Did the Father not love him? Did he not suffer?

*Pastor:* Jesus is different. That was all planned, kind of like a script. He suffered so that we might have abundant life, abundance in every way.

*Paul:* Then I'm confused again. I read these words in the gospel reading this morning: "None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions." That does not sound like abundance to me.

*Pastor:* More negative talk. None of us are going to do that. Only some religious fanatic would love Jesus more than they love their possessions.

*Paul:* But people are hungry, pastor. And some have no decent home to live in. And folks in the nursing home need someone to fight for their rights. Who will be their help if we are not?

*Pastor:* God will find somebody, Paul.

*Paul:* That's just what Jesus was saying, Pastor. God will find somebody and if we are going to be those somebodies then we have to count the cost. The cost is putting Jesus before our family, and ourselves, before our own needs, before our possessions.

*Pastor:* Like the folks did who helped with the Habitat House? I couldn't believe it when I heard some people were actually taking off work to help on their own time. I guess they did count the cost. Maybe that is what Jesus meant with the example of the man building the tower. He needed to decide if he had what it took to complete the job. I guess the Habitat workers did.

*Paul:* Loving those who have nothing to give us in return is costly. But I find my life is more abundant when I give myself.

*Pastor:* Maybe Jesus was not just following a script, but was giving himself in the most costly way for us. He loved us more than he did his own life. He chose to give himself for us even though it meant sorrow for his mother, Mary, and disappointment and bewilderment for his friends. Even his only possessions, the clothes he wore he lost for us.

*Paul:* And now he wants us to be just like him.