

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

Once that year we came to Ohio. From North Dakota we journeyed to spend a week at my parent’s home – Sue and I and at that time our only child, Matthew. That my father would go off to work each morning I took for granted. But when my mom went off to the Betty Rinderle school in Huron the first morning we were here I was a little upset. She volunteered there regularly and our visit did not change that. And later in the week she spent an afternoon at the Erie County Home – visiting the residents there who had no one else who visited them. It seemed to me that family should come first but for my mom her commitment to these others did not take second place.

Here is a conversation I have had more than once. “Pastor, we will not be here next Sunday – we have family visiting from out of town.”

“Could you bring them with you?”

“I don’t think they would like to come?”

End of conversation.

And then there was the year I missed Holy Week and Easter here. Our son, Matt, a senior at the University of Minnesota was swimming in his final NCAA Championship meet at Minnesota. Sue and I went to the meet on Thursday, Friday and Saturday. Sunday morning we sat in the pew at University Lutheran in Minneapolis. Rather than being here with you we put family first.

Now large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and he turned and said to them, “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.

Family first????? No, says Jesus, not family first. God first, following Jesus first, helping one in need first. But not family.

Now family is a good thing. When parents care for their children and children honor and respect their parents we are all blessed. The first of the Ten Commandments that has to do with our relationship to one another is honor your father and your mother. It comes before the commandments about murder and adultery and stealing and truth telling. But that command to honor father and mother comes after the command to have no other gods, and the command to not use the name of the Lord your God in vain and the command to remember the sabbath day to keep it holy. Family is important but not most important. Following Jesus comes before family.

My mother was witnessing to that when she did not put aside the needs of children with developmental problems just because I was visiting.

Some of you bring your children to church even when they do not want to come. You make the extra effort to be faithful to Jesus even if it causes some unhappiness in your home. Others do whatever makes their child happy in the moment. Jesus wants us all to make a wise choice – to put him first.

What will take first place in your family? A job that means more money yet also means more time away from family and less time to be among God’s people?

A travel soccer or baseball team or involvement in cheerleading competition that means you will not be gathering with God's people on Sunday mornings? Does what happens here matter enough to come before these other activities?

Jesus does want us to think about these things – to realize that we are making choices that matter. He said, “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? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ or 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? If he cannot then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. So therefore, none of you can become my disciples if you do not give up all your possessions.”

Do you think the crowd that was following Jesus that day all left him?

“None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.”

Like family, having money is a good thing. Food, clothing, shelter are all good gifts of God. But like family they can become more important to us than following Jesus. Battles over money can divide families, divide churches.

I wish I had a snappy ending for this sermon – something to make it clear that following Jesus is not costly after all. You are saved by what Jesus has done – not by what you are able to do. Yet Jesus does not want us to compromise when it comes to following him, trusting in him. He knows that when we do we and our children are not blessed.

Count the cost. Consider what you are choosing for your life and the lives of those you love.

Follow Jesus. Amen.

