

BUILDING COSTS

LUKE 14:25-35

LETHBRIDGE MENNONITE CHURCH

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Over the last few weeks we have spent time dwelling on some difficult texts from some difficult texts (Leviticus and Joshua, to name the most obvious examples).

Perhaps some of you have been thinking, “I’m getting a little sick of all these Old Testament texts... I can’t *wait* until we get back into the New Testament where we can talk about Jesus!!”

Well, we’re back in the New Testament this morning. I imagine you found our text this morning easier to stomach? ☺

Jesus says some hard things, doesn’t he?

This morning’s text is not easy to listen to. It wasn’t easy to listen to for *me* and I’ve spent all week with it! I’m sure the ears of parents and their children perked up a bit right about the time when Jesus was telling us to hate our parents... and our spouses and siblings...

Aren’t you glad we’re back in the New Testament? ☺

From now until Advent, we’re going to be spending a lot of time in the Gospel of Luke. We’re going to encounter some familiar stories and teachings, as well as some not-so-familiar ones.

We’re going to encounter some texts that are encouraging and inspiring, and some that are just plain weird and difficult!

The NT is not necessarily always easier to swallow than the OT.

Having said that, the more time I’ve spent with this text this week, the more I’ve become convinced that this is good news to us and for us.

It is good news as we launch into a new year of Sunday School.

It is good news as *all of us* continue on the journey of being formed in the image of Jesus.

What do I mean by this?

I'll get to that by way of the following...

It is something of a truism to say that to be a human being in the 21st century west is to be the target of an astonishing array of advertising.

One article I read this week claimed that the average person is subjected to nearly *five thousand* advertisements a day—up from around *five hundred* a day as recently as the 1970s.

Of course, this is just as true—if not *more* true—in when it comes to religion.

I regularly get bombarded with emails offering everything from educational resources, evangelistic programs, training seminars, e-conferences, retreat opportunities, leadership forums.... The list quite literally does go on and on and on and on...

Some of these are probably good.

But I notice a common thread that runs throughout these endless “opportunities.”

Each offers, in their own way, the promise of *more* and *better*.

I am promised that my church will experience exponential growth, that our worship will be dynamic and inspiring, that we will attract all kinds of newcomers, that I will become the leader God wants me to be, that joy and fulfillment and blessing are waiting just around the corner, if only I will attend... purchase... get on board...

When I come across these advertisements, I always feel like someone is trying to manipulate me, however slightly, into buying their product.

The proverbial straw that broke the camel's back came via an apparently sincere email from a woman wondering if our church had a sermon app for iPhones where she could listen to sermons.

I was flattered. Here was someone—a stranger!—who wanted to listen to our church's sermons! How delightful.

And then I looked a bit more carefully at the signature at the bottom of the email. It listed her as a representative for a “church app” organization. I began to grow a bit suspicious.

Sure enough, after directing her to our church website where she could listen to or read all of our sermons, she responded by excitedly offering to “help us” with our apparent need for a sermon app.

Another person trying to sell me something.

And, of course, many of us are very familiar with faith itself being treated as a product. We are familiar with preachers and teachers saying “Believe this, do this, give more!” and watch the blessings of heaven pour down... Or watch your loved one get healed... Or watch God unfold the roadmap for your life!”

Faith and God are packaged as a product to make us happy or fulfilled or to deliver miracles to us or whatever.

“Jesus is waiting to bring you your hearts desire! Just buy my book! Or listen to my sermons! Or come to my seminars!”

With this in mind, let’s look our text this morning.

The crowds are pressing in, Luke says... they’re expectant, they’re hungry for a miracle, they’re ready for change!

What does *Jesus* say? What does *he* promise?

He tells us to hate our families... to take up our cross... to sell all of our possessions... to give up *everything* to follow him.

Not exactly the way to work a crowd ☺. Not exactly the brightest sales pitch. Apparently Jesus didn’t know much about “up-selling.”

And yet... I am convinced that this *is* good news. Why?

Jesus dignifies us by being honest with us.

He doesn’t sugar coat anything. He doesn’t spin things to make his offer seem more attractive. He doesn’t subtly try to steer us or manipulate us.

He tells us the truth.

Are Jesus’ words hard? Absolutely.

None of us wants to think about “hating” those we love the most, even if we know that Jesus is speaking in hyperbole here, to get his hearers’ attention.

We know Jesus *can’t* mean we’re *literally* supposed to hate our family.

Earlier in the same chapter of Luke, Jesus points to the obvious fact that *any* parent would save their child on the Sabbath in order to jolt the Pharisees into getting their priorities straight.

And in the very next passage, he’s telling the story of the Prodigal son—a story of the extravagant love of a father for his son!

Jesus clearly thinks very highly of familial love.

He is using these exaggerated statements to force his hearers into facing the reality that the call to discipleship represents the highest calling we can embrace—one that transcends every other commitment.

Every family relation, every commitment, everything about who we are what we do in the world must find its place within our exclusive allegiance to Jesus and commitment to following his pattern in the world.

Jesus does not insult us or reduce us to a statistic or a dollar sign. He addresses us like human beings, created by God with the freedom to choose.

He is brutally honest. Count the cost. Decide if this is worth it to you. The way I am calling you to is not easy.

I am calling you to a life of self-sacrifice when everything around you screams that you are the most important thing in the world.

I am calling you to die to yourself and your desires, and to learn what it means to love your neighbours, even your *enemies*, when everything around you says, “protect yourself at all costs.”

I am calling you to unapologetically proclaim that God was in Christ reconciling all things to himself under heaven and earth when the stories all around you proclaim that there is no broader story of redemption that we are a part of, and that human beings have no destiny or purpose beyond the grave.

I am calling you to a love like no other—a love that keeps no record of wrongs, a love that always hopes, trusts, perseveres, protects—in a world where love is often seen to be little more than a fleeting emotion that comes and goes.

I am calling you to trust in a future that you cannot see—even, or *especially* when it is hard, when it seems impossible.

I am calling you to a life of prayer—of lament and persistent petition and intercession for those who suffer—when everything around you proclaims that this is useless wish projection and that you might as well talk to the wall.

I am calling you to a life that embraces an upside-down value system where the first are last and the last are first, in a world gorging itself on celebrity and the trivialities of the rich and the smart and the sleek and the sexy.

I am calling you to identify with the poor and the vulnerable, to honour their humanity, to pursue justice and equality on their behalf, and to learn from them in a context that rarely sees them as anything more than a social burden.

I am calling you to a life of generosity, when so many voices all around implore you to look after yourself and those close to you first (or even exclusively).

And I am calling you to choose all of this and more for yourself.

Don't rely on the faith you grew up with. Don't rely on the faith of your parents or your church or your favourite author or your pastor or whatever.

Kids, I'm thinking particularly of you today.

Each week we tell you stories or teach you lessons in the hopes that your imaginations will be captured by the story of Jesus—a story that your parents have embraced and are seeking to live by.

We try to show you that this is a life that is good and true and beautiful, and that *you belong in this story too!* And we know that helping you on the journey of faith is a privilege and an honour, and that **all** of us **grow into** the life of faith through the influence and instruction of others.

But ultimately, Jesus' command comes to each of us as individuals. Count the cost. Choose for yourself. What do *you* say?

In John 6, Jesus has just finished another bewildering conversation with his disciples filled with difficult teaching.

Many turn away from Jesus, deciding that the cost was too high.

Jesus turns to Peter and says, “what about you? Are you going to leave, too?” And, of course, we know Peter’s response very well.

“Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

You have the words of eternal life.

You are the one who also promised that your burden was light and that in you we would find rest for our souls.

You are the one who promised life to the full.

Jesus uses the metaphor of a building. The Christian conviction is that the building of a genuinely human life requires different materials than the ones we might assume—and that when we count the cost, take up our cross, and build a life with Jesus, allowing him to reorient and reshape our behaviours and beliefs and habits—we paradoxically find ourselves living life *as it was intended to be*.

As we head into the year ahead, may we count the cost. And may we continually choose Jesus, above all else, as the path to life.

Amen.