

## Luke 14:25-33 “What Does it Take?”

The phrase that pays this week is, “Measured hyperbole.” Remember that one. We’ll use it on a few occasions this morning. Say it with me, “Measured hyperbole.” And of course, the definition of hyperbole is an “exaggerated statements or claim not meant to be taken literally.” Let’s say it again, “Measured hyperbole.”

Okay. Luke 14. Sorry about that Georgeanne. It’s one of those passages that you’ve got to jump on when the lectionary throws it at you. See, this is a great passage of scripture to read when you think you have Jesus all figured out, but .... not really. The first thing people notice about this passage is how harsh it sounds. People say, “Now wait a minute! So many churches are talking about ‘Christian family values,’ and yet here’s Jesus saying, “If you want to be my disciple you have to hate your mother and father?” Why in the world would he say something like that? What’s the phrase that pays this week? “Measured hyperbole.” In other words, this was *meant* to be a “shock you” kind of passage. It’s an intense passage. This is an “I want you to know what you’re getting into” kind of passage. Here’s another thing you need to know about this scripture - This isn’t Jesus having a one-on-one conversation with someone. This isn’t “Jesus and the Rich Young Ruler” or “Jesus speaks to Nicodemus the Pharisee who came to see him at night.” This was Jesus talking to a large crowd.

Sometimes when we pull a passage out of the Bible like this, we don’t look back to see what led up to it. This passage takes place late in Jesus’ ministry. This takes place when Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem where he’d eventually be betrayed, arrested and crucified. He was pretty well known, and dare I say famous by this time in his ministry. He’d been teaching, preaching, and healing for three years at this point. He was drawing negative attention from all the right people. From the corrupt Jewish religious leaders who were in the back pockets of the Roman rulers, and the Roman rulers themselves who feared he would instigate an uprising. At this point, wherever he went, he drew large

crowds. This passage comes from an address he made to a large crowd that started much earlier than where Georgeanne picked it up here in verse 25. The majority of the crowd that Jesus was addressing were not his disciples. Don't get me wrong, there were a good number of disciples who followed Jesus wherever he went, including his inner circle of twelve apostles who we know a lot about because they are specifically named and they play important roles in his ministry before and after his death and resurrection.

But again, the vast majority of these crowds were present because Jesus was famous. Folks liked to see celebrities back in the first century as much as people in the twenty-first century like to see them. And of course, when you gather that many people together to hear a radical teacher who heals and performs miracles and who has an entourage of followers, there's bound to be folks in the crowd who think, "Wow! Wouldn't it be great to be one of his disciples?" And that's what we have here in this passage. People in the large crowd began asking, "What does it take to be one of your disciples?"

To be a disciple of Jesus meant that you had to be willing to commit the time, energy, and resources to not only follow Jesus, but be actively engaged in his ministry too. Christian Piatt, a Disciples theologian who has led men's retreats here in the region once wrote, "The disciples were kind of like the samurai of the early Christian movement, and like the samurai, there were probably plenty of people in the general population who thought it would be cool to be like them." But Jesus knew that most of the folks who wanted to be disciples had no idea how much it would cost them. The ones who made the commitment to be disciples left everything and everyone behind. Most of them knew that by following Jesus, they were putting their lives in jeopardy. In fact, some of them, after Jesus' crucifixion were killed for continuing to follow him. The early church called them, "martyrs." But they followed him anyway. The pay was terrible, the hours were long, and there really wasn't much respect or glamor in the gig. For most, the calling to discipleship would require a price that was too high than most were

willing to pay. Jesus didn't want anyone to be caught by surprise by this, so he used a tool to help communicate what following him would be like. And this tool is the phrase that pays which is: "Measured hyperbole." The question on the table then, and here today in worship today is, "What does it take to truly be a disciple of Christ?" Jesus' response is basically, "Everything you've got." Not only do you have to be willing to give up all of your possessions, but even your emotional bonds to friends and family. It is an investment that cannot be made through half measures.

Now ... I'm always skeptical of things that are popular. Popular Christianity, popular psychology, popular science. It's easy. It makes sense. It's easily digestible. But anything of real value is a lot harder and a lot more complicated and a lot more nuanced. And I think that's what's happening here. In his day, Jesus was popular. But Jesus wasn't looking for popularity. So he was saying, "Let me tell you all what you're getting into - If it's between your faith and your family, your faith comes first." Jesus isn't telling us to "hate" our families. Here's where our phrase that pays comes into play. This is "measured hyperbole." If it's between your life or your faith? Faith is first." "If it's between your possessions and your faith? Faith is first." Following the way of Jesus is more important than family, it's more important than your safety and security, and it's more important than possessions. Think about this: Those three things – money/possessions, personal safety and family are the three great idols that humans worship. So this is a really radical thing Jesus is saying here. But this kind of "measured hyperbole" can sound so terribly harsh and condemning. But here's the thing ... I don't hear a word of condemnation in this passage. It's a word of, "Hey, I want you to know what you're getting into." Because if what you're getting into is, "Whoa! Look at all these people following this guy around, this is the hip thing to do!" you're going to be sorely disappointed.

Mark Davis, another contemporary Bible scholar and translator gets into this phrase, "cannot be my disciples." Luke uses this phrase twice: Once

in verse 26 and another time in verse 33. Davis said that the better translation is probably “is not able” rather than “cannot.” It’s not that Jesus is shunning you if you have your “stuff.” It’s not that Jesus is actively shutting you out. It’s that your unwillingness to let go means you’re unwilling to follow. This gets to the heart of what Jesus is talking about. Jesus isn’t going around shutting people out who love their family. He’s saying, “If you’re really going to follow me, you need to let go.” And this is tough and frustrating all at the same time. Because this Jesus who said, “Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple” is also the one who said, “My burden is easy and my yoke is light” over in Matthew’s gospel. So which is it? This isn’t a call to have everyone take a vow of poverty and withdraw from society and head into the caves and eat locusts and raw honey.” Balance is important when we consider what Jesus says. This passage in front of us this morning is a perfect balance for the things that we like to cling to. It challenges our assumptions about what it means to be a disciple, especially an American Christian disciple. Here’s something to think about when we’re trying to contrast “my burden is easy and my yoke is light” with “whoever doesn’t carry the cross and follow me isn’t able to be my disciple.” Maybe it’s when we relieve ourselves of the burdens that drag us down in life, then we realize that the yoke gets easier to carry.”

So fine, that takes a little edge of the “possessions” matter. But what about the “family” matter? That’s the one we have the most trouble with. And if you didn’t catch it before, I said, “One of the three great idols we worship is the idol of family.” I hope that caught your attention and I hope it didn’t sound right to you, because I know it doesn’t sound right to me either. But let’s consider the idol of trying to be the perfect parent. Or let’s consider the idol of trying to have the perfect family. These are important points to examine. In Jesus’ times, family wasn’t all about familial relationships and having Sunday dinner together with the wife and kids and all that. The family was your social safety net. Your family was your inheritance, your social standing, your identity, your *everything*. To say “I hate those things” was a way of saying, “I

disregard these things for the sake of following Christ.” It was a way of saying, I’m willing to give up my comfort and security and social standing to follow Jesus. The cultural context of what it means to disregard your family is really important and it’s very much tied to your possessions and your ability to live what we would consider a life of comfort. Carrying the cross isn’t carrying “death and sacrifice” and all the things you’ve got to give up. It’s actually a choice to pick up life. It’s a choice to pick up the kingdom of God ... that “lighter yoke.” What do our possessions cost us? What does the burden of having the “perfect family” cost us? These other idols cost us big time. But maybe picking up the cross and the path toward the kingdom of God ... maybe that’s where the real value of discipleship lies. What ... does ... it ... take?

Jesus didn’t hate the world or anything in the world. We hear again and again throughout the Bible about how God so loved – and loves – the world. The difference is that Jesus knows not to cling too tightly to those things that are not firmly anchored, that ultimately will crumble away. The only truly sustainable, enduring resource is that of divinely inspired love. But the cost of submitting to that love means cutting ties with anything else that holds any power in our lives. What does it take? It takes everything.