

## Weekly Devotional Guide

*This week we focus on the real cost of being a disciple of Jesus Christ. Spend time thinking about the difference between just being one of the crowd who followed Jesus around and one of Jesus' disciples.*

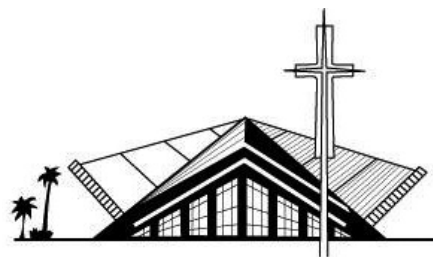
**Monday:** A disciple can be defined as a student and is the term used to describe someone committed to learning the ways and teachings of Jesus. Said another way, being a disciple is the difference between being a somewhat familiar “follower” and a “FOLLOWER” of Jesus. How would you rate yourself? Read Deuteronomy 33.9, Matthew 10.37-38, and Luke 14.25-26.

**Tuesday:** In Luke 14.28-32, Jesus refers to the need for a builder to accurately assess the cost of building a building before beginning to build, and a king to determine the military strength of his own troops and that of the opposition before engaging in battle. Why? Now read verse 33. How do you interpret these examples when comparing each to estimating the cost of being a disciple?

**Wednesday:** Salt has been used as a food preservative from ancient times to maintain its freshness/goodness. In fact, quite a lot of salt might be required depending upon what is being preserved. How does this example apply to you as a Christian? What needs preserving within you? What is being required of you as a preserved Christian? Required of the church?

**Thursday:** Read Job 6.6-7 and Luke 14.34-35. From ancient times, salt has also been used as a seasoning or flavor enhancer for food. Have you ever begun to eat something and discovered you needed to add salt in order to enjoy it? As Christians, we are called to bring seasoning (joy, happiness, love, care, etc.) to others. What is your Christian salt content? Are you more light salt, table salt or rock salt?

**Friday:** Jesus challenges us to examine the cost of being a true disciple—a real FOLLOWER of Christ. Repeatedly, he reminds us that being a Christian is not for the faint of heart. No, we won't always be admired, looked up to or exalted for our way of being in the world. In fact, we may face ridicule or worse depending upon what kind of follower we choose to be. Certainly in our culture simply being one of the Sunday church attenders may not cost much. But the deeper we go in our studies, the more the cost adds up—in time, money, life choices. How deeply committed are you to paying the price for being a Christian? How committed can you afford to be—or not to be?



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PASADENA COMMUNITY CHURCH

## Lessons from Luke: The Cost of Discipleship

Sunday, September 5, 2010

Sermon by: Rev. Dr. Charley Reeb, Senior Pastor  
Scripture Lesson: Luke 14:25-35

I've come to a difficult conclusion. I don't think Jesus would have made a very good local church pastor. I have had my doubts preaching through Luke the last several weeks, but this week's text clinched it for me. Jesus would have been a very poor local church pastor. How do I know that? Well, because of a lot of things Jesus had to say, but most especially because of the way he responded to a large crowd in our text today.

Jesus had attracted scores of people with his preaching and miracles. He had become somewhat of a celebrity. One day Jesus saw a huge throng of people following him and you know what he did? He didn't call the disciples to take up an offering. He didn't lay out his plans for building a new worship center and ask the crowd to pledge to the building campaign. He didn't tell them about an upcoming sermon series he was going to do and tell them to bring their friends. He didn't brag to the disciples about how many people had come to hear him preach. He turned to the crowd and told them, “Unless you are willing to give up family, the things you love and take up a cross, you cannot be my disciples.”

Now, if you want to know how to thin out a

crowd real quick, here is your answer. In fact, Randy Hyde suggests that after hearing these words from Jesus some of us may be tempted not to come back to church. I really hope that is not the case, but you never know.

If Jesus would not have made a good local church pastor, I believe it is safe to say that Jesus would not have made a very good church growth consultant, either. I have been to all the seminars. The guru's tell you that if you want to grow a church you have to do demographic studies of your area, preach on topics that people like, build coffee houses, have state of the art technology, create a warm and welcoming environment. Basically, the church growth experts tell you that you are competing with more entertaining options, so you better give people what they want, which is the exact opposite of what Jesus does. Jesus says that if we are not willing to give up what we want, we cannot follow him. I guess Jesus could have used a few church growth seminars.

Now, imagine if we had a meeting with all our ushers and greeters and I told them to say to people as they came into church, “Now, are you sure you really want to do this? Do you know what you are getting into? Now, think hard

about this. This Jesus you are about to worship wants you to change your priorities, change your life. So make a list of the things that are most important to you and then be willing to give them up, okay? Think hard about this. Are you sure you are willing to do this? Are you sure you are willing to take up a cross everyday for Jesus?" (Randy Hyde, "Imagine If We Told the Truth").

This is basically what Jesus did to the crowd that day. He saw the crowd, didn't think they knew what they were getting into and said, "Are you sure you want to do this? Are you sure you want to follow me? Do you know where I am going? I'm going to the cross. So count the cost. Don't sign up unless you are willing to pay the price."

I am sure the crowd reacted the same way we react to these words – shocked, offended, uncomfortable, confused, annoyed. The text does not tell us, but I am willing to bet that Jesus' approval rating went down considerably after this little speech. I see the disciples dropping their heads and shaking them, "What is he doing? Is he trying to ruin his career? Is he trying to sabotage his Messiah Campaign. He can't say those kinds of things to people and expect to be supported?" You see, the disciples probably didn't know what they were getting into either.

And I wonder if we do. Do we really know what we are getting into? You turn on the television and see preachers and religious entertainers present the gospel like they are selling a used car. It is cotton candy theology. Not much nourishment, but it sure does taste good. No sacrifice or commitment required. Take what you want, leave what you don't. It will accessorize your life really well; help get you the things you want in life. They call it Christianity, but it sure looks nothing like the Jesus we find in the gospels who tells us to give up everything for him.

You listen to talking heads on the TV present the gospel as consistent with middle class American values. It sounds nice, but it is hard to find many people in our culture who are willing to give up what they want for a larger purpose.

You see, that is what is so tough about Jesus, the real Jesus, the one we find in the gospels and the one who lives and reigns today – if we decide

to follow him, he does not leave us room for anything else. All that is required to follow Jesus is all we have. What makes this especially difficult is that there is no room for any excuses.

What do you mean you want me to give 10% to the church? I can't do that! I have other commitments and expenses – "I warned you to count the cost! I'm your number one priority, remember. If you can't give me your money, do I really have your heart?"

What do you mean you want me to forgive that lady who betrayed me? I can't do that! – "I warned you to count the cost. You must forgive others, just as I have forgiven you."

What do you mean you want me to give up my Sunday mornings? That is my only day to get things done around the house and relax! – "I warned you to count the cost. Your time belongs to me."

What do you mean the kids can't play soccer because it is on Sunday mornings? – "I warned you to count the cost. You have a responsibility to teach your children what it means to follow me."

What do you mean I'm supposed to love and be kind to that person who is unlovable? – "I warned you to count the cost. I never said following me would be convenient or easy."

What do you mean you want me to share my faith with my buddies? They will laugh at me! – "I warned you to count the cost. If your friends don't know I am your Lord, are you really my disciple?"

What do you mean you want me to stop looking at things I'm not supposed to look at, and not be attached to things I am not supposed to be attached to? I am still a nice person – "I warned you to count the cost. I never said it was going to be easy. I didn't call you to be nice. I called you to be a new creation."

This Jesus is relentless. But we can't say he never warned us. He did. He warned us to count the cost, that we have to be willing to give up everything to follow him. He even uses the word "hate." This is a bad translation. This word Jesus uses does not mean anger or hostility; it means "to turn away from," "to detach from." What this means is that Jesus takes precedence over every other loyalty and commitment in our lives.

Sometimes this means turning away from something or giving up something. For some folks it means changing their relationships. For others it means changing what they do with their time and energy. Still, for some, it means changing what they do with their money. For many, it means listening for the very first time.

The truth of the matter is the call to follow Jesus is not like a Hallmark card; it is like the ad for the Marines – "We don't take applications. Just commitments."

I believe this is why Luke put in that little phrase from Jesus about salt losing its flavor. Just as salt can lose its flavor, so can our commitment to Jesus, especially when other commitments in our lives are tested. Fred Craddock observes that "the process can be so gradual that no one really notices. Well, almost no one."

If following Jesus is so hard, so tough, so difficult – if so much is required to follow Jesus then who in their right mind would want to follow Jesus? Why follow Jesus? There are other things out there that don't require so much from us. Why? Because being a follower of Jesus Christ is the only life worth living. It is only by following Jesus Christ that we discover our destiny. It is only by following Jesus that we discover who we really are. It is only by following Jesus Christ that we find wholeness. You see, sin and brokenness has brainwashed us so much that we have things backwards. We think happiness comes from getting what we want when the truth is that joy is only found by giving ourselves away in Christ. Transforming our minds and hearts to this truth can be painful, but it is worth it.

Fred Craddock loves to talk about the early years of his ministry in Custer City, Oklahoma, a town of about 450 souls. There were four churches there, a Methodist church, a Baptist church, a Nazarene church, and a Christian church (where Fred served). Each had its share of the population on Wednesday night, Sunday morning, and Sunday evening. Each had a small collection of young people, and the attendance rose and fell according to the weather and whether it was time to harvest the wheat. But the most consistent attendance in town was at the little café where all the pickup trucks were parked, and all the men were inside discussing

the weather, and the cattle, and the wheat bugs, and the hail, and the wind, and is there going to be a crop. All their wives and sons and daughters were in one of those four churches. The churches had good attendance and poor attendance, but the café had consistently good attendance, better attendance than some of the churches. They were always there - not bad men, but good men, family men, hard-working men. Fred says the patron saint of the group that met at the café was named Frank. Frank was seventy-seven when they first met. He was a good, strong man, a pioneer, a rancher and farmer, and a prospering cattle man too. He had been born in a sod house; he had his credentials, and all the men there at the café considered him their patron saint. "Ha! Old Frank will never go to church."

Fred said, "I met Frank on the street one time. He knew I was a preacher, but it has never been my custom to accost people in the name of Jesus, so I just was shaking hands and visiting with him, but he took the offensive. He said, 'I work hard, I take care of my family and I mind my own business. Far as I'm concerned, everything else is fluff.' In other words, 'Leave me alone, I'm not a prospect.'" He didn't bother Frank.

That's why the entire church, and the whole town were surprised, and the men at the café church were absolutely bumfuzzled when old Frank, seventy-seven years old, presented himself one Sunday morning for baptism. He baptized Frank. Some of the talk in the community was, "Frank must be sick. Guess he's scared to meet his maker. They say he's got heart trouble. Going up there and being baptized, well, I never thought ol' Frank would do that, but I guess when you get scared..." All kinds of stories. Fred said, "We were talking the next day after his baptism, and I said, 'Uh, Frank, you remember that little saying you used to give me so much: 'I work hard, I take care of my family, I mind my own business?'" Frank said, "Yeah, I remember. I said that a lot." Fred said, "You still say that?" Frank said, "Yeah." Fred said, "Then what's the difference?"

Frank replied, "I didn't know then what my business was." (Craddock story adapted from a message by David Leininger).

Let those who have ears to hear, hear. Amen.