

OUR LIFE IN CHRIST IS A LIFE IN TENSION
Sermon for the 13th Sunday after Pentecost, 2019
Luke 14:25-35

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel read before, Luke 14:25-35: ²⁵ **Large crowds were travelling with Jesus. He turned to them and said,** ²⁶ **“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father, mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters, yes and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.** ²⁷ **Whoever does not carry his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.** ²⁸ **For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate what it will cost, to see if he has enough to finish it? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and cannot finish the building, all who watch him might begin to make fun of him,** ³⁰ **and say, ‘This man began to build but could not finish it.’ ³¹ Or what king, on his way to make war against another king, does not first sit down and consider whether with ten thousand men he can oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? ³² Otherwise, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation to ask for terms of peace. ³³ In the same way, therefore, whoever of you does not give up everything that he has cannot be My disciple. ³⁴ Therefore, salt is good. However, if salt loses its taste, how will it be seasoned? ³⁵ It is no good either for the soil or for the manure pile. People throw it away. He who has ears to hear should listen!”**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Quite often people picture Jesus as a calm, nonthreatening, warm human being – a loving Man that doesn’t get ruffled or easily agitated. However, that Jesus isn’t the Jesus who shows up in Luke 14. First, in the Gospel last Sunday, Jesus said, *“Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled,”* (Luke 14:11). Now today He cranks up the pressure with the shocking statement, **“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father, mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters, yes and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.”** A call to hate the very people we were created to love is jarring, and sounds contradictory, since His Word also says that anyone who hates his brother is a murderer.¹ These words of Jesus gets our attention, just as it was meant to get the attention of the crowds gathered around Jesus. Our life in Christ *is a life in tension*.

Some would say that Jesus’ call to discipleship in Luke 14 is beyond radical, that it’s fanatical. Not able to stand the tension of the text, we may be tempted *to explain away the tension*. So it is that some pastors feel it’s their role to take these difficult passages and make them seem more reasonable. Through the use of the original Greek and a few well-placed literary devices, they try to calm the congregation so they won’t be too distressed with Jesus’ statement. But such an effort to calm the congregation would betray the purpose for which these words were spoken.

Rather than dodge the tension, we must be challenged to allow the tension to do what it’s supposed to do: bring our daily life in alignment with our faith life. Sometimes when we have a pain in our hip, our lower leg, or our shoulder, a chiropractor, with some pushing, twisting, and pulling, brings our spine back into alignment, and the pain goes away. The pushing and pulling is the tension of our text. What we believe and what we live can get out of alignment. Living in the tension of this text *brings us the alignment we need*. We discover that heeding the call of Jesus to discipleship means giving up everything for Him.

Luke begins with the statement that **large crowds were travelling with Jesus**. It’s important to note the terminology. Jesus is not talking to the disciples or the inner circle of the three. He’s talking to masses that are following Him. They have not lost their curiosity and are waiting in anticipation for the next miracle Jesus might perform. They wanted to watch the action. They wanted to learn but not actually do. In his Second Letter to Timothy, Paul talks about people who are *“always learning”* but *“never able to come to know the truth,”* (2 Timothy 3:7). Paul’s words describe this crowd. They’re interested but not committed. It’s to this crowd that Jesus issues this shocking ultimatum: *“Hate your father and mother, give up everything you have, take up your cross and follow Me.”* In other words, the life we are called to live in Christ necessitates our active and uncompromising participation.

¹ 1 John 3:15

The crowd has been just passive spectators to the kingdom of God. Rather than looking to see if Jesus will perform another miracle, it's time for them to wake up and join the mission. Discipleship is not a spectator sport. It demands participation than can be both costly and active.

The cost of discipleship is shocking to our ears. Jesus really did say, **“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father, mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters, yes and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.”** There's no easy way to hear these words. The call to discipleship is a call to hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters. These words jar our modern ears. Does Jesus really mean that we are to hate our **father, mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters, yes and (our) own life also?** In his Gospel, Matthew records the softer formulation that makes “hate” correspond to *“not love more than”* (Matt. 10:37), i.e., we are not to love family “more than” Jesus and His kingdom. This is the meaning of “hate” here in Luke's Gospel, but Luke preserves the expression in all its hardness, and it can only be understood in the context of Jesus' overturning the Jewish laws of kinship and showing one's true family is first and foremost the family of God, where membership is by grace through faith by means of hearing the Word and Baptism. If one sees this family as of first importance, then one can fear and love God and rightly love and honour fellow Christians and human family, in keeping with the Lord's word: *“My mother and My brothers are these who are hearing the Word of God and putting it into practice”* (Luke 8:21).

We cannot mix allegiances, attention, or affection. When push comes to shove, we must choose one over the other. So the time to make the choice is now, not later. To be clear, the choice *is not literally to hate your friends and family*. It is, however, a call to put faith first, obedience first, Jesus first in life.

That's what it looks like when we faithfully follow Jesus. It looks like living out our faith, sharing the Gospel, and defending the truth, even when the rest of our family or friends are wringing their hands, asking us to tone it down. It looks like standing up and speaking out the Gospel truth, even when we fear the consequences. Now discipleship is not the same thing as acting like a goose, being rude, judgmental, or condescending. Our most effective weapon in the kingdom of God is love. We can't shout people into heaven, but we can't remain passive and silent and expect them to wake up to the truth. The call of discipleship is costly, and today is the day to wake up and start living by boldly speaking the truth about our Saviour to those who do not know Jesus.

Yes, it always feels safe to have one foot on the dock and one foot in the boat. You don't want to miss the fun of a journey, so you tentatively step one foot into the boat. But if the boat starts to go crazy, you've not fully committed; you can always get back on the dock. That is, until the boat starts moving - creeping away from the dock. At that moment you realise that having one foot on the dock and one in the boat is the absolute worst position to be in. Worse yet, the moment of choosing has passed. Now you have one choice, though it's not really a choice. Your only option is a very wet future. Following Jesus is like that. You cannot have one foot anchored in the things this world values and another foot anchored in the things that God values. The time is now! Wake up and start living for the kingdom of God.

Second, God makes it clear that the cost of discipleship is not just surrender of our family. Jesus calls us to surrender everything. **“If anyone... does not hate... his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.”**

As with our relationships, Jesus is not calling us literally to give away everything we have and to hate living. He is calling us to view all of God's good gifts from the steward's perspective. If I'm the owner, the well-being of my property and my relationships is dependent on my work and my diligence. This means my focus is on my stuff. I'm not focused on the things of God. By surrendering ownership to Jesus, I manage and care for His good gifts, but I know that their safety and well-being are in God's hands, not mine.

This shift does two things. First, it aligns our priorities with God's priorities: people before stuff, eternal before temporal. Second, it releases us from the anxiety and stress we experience because of our stuff. While it is not mentioned in this passage, Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 7 that surrendering ownership of our families and our possessions is liberating. He says, *“For the form of this world is passing away. However, I want you to be free from concern”* (1 Cor. 7:31b-32a).

While the cost of discipleship is shocking to our ears, the activity of discipleship would have been terrifying to the hearers in the crowd. Luke 14 is the call to carry our cross. Jesus continues, **“Whoever does not carry his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.”**

The phrase **“carry his cross”** has meant many things to many people. Some use it to refer to the heartache and pain they've suffered because of the loss of a loved one or because of illness or disease. They assert that Jesus is calling us to live a life of suffering. Others say that the call is a call to evangelism, that we are to carry the message of Christ's death and resurrection with us wherever we go. While both views have their following, it seems that the context demand a third view. Crucifixion, in Jesus' day, was a common form of punishment for the rebels who sought to overthrow Rome. It was not

uncommon for the rebels to refer to the burden of their cause as a cross, for they knew that if they did not die in battle, they would likely die by crucifixion. They approached their cause with the belief that they were already dead men, and that death could possibly come through the cross.

Imagine what this challenge must have sounded like to the crowd. Jesus is not calling them to a metaphor; people were literally being crucified along the roads between their towns for being insurrectionists. A call to carry the cross was a call to live life as if judgment had already been passed and now each step they took was a step that brought them nearer to the place of their execution. This was the worst possible death known at that time, and now this kind, loving Teacher is telling them that to follow Him is to choose such a death? While the challenge may be uncomfortable for us, it must have been terrifying for the crowd.

So what do we do with this tension, with this radical, if not fanatical, call to follow Jesus? Living in the tension begins with understanding the true source of the tension. Jesus' call is not the source of the tension; our sin is. We were created to walk with God, without distraction or compromise, just as it was in the Garden of Eden before the fall of humanity into sin. It is sin that pits two loves against each other. It is our weakness that drives us to love one and hate the other. Rather than blaming Christ for setting impossibly high standards, we must blame our sinful, broken lives that have made our separation from God seem normal.

Second, we rejoice. Yes, the tension we feel in this challenge is a good thing. We rejoice that our life in Christ rests upon His perfect love, undivided devotion, and unwavering sacrifice. Jesus did what we could not do. Through His death on the cross, He has defeated sin and conquered the grave. This victory and new life He gives to us as a gift. In Baptism, our old nature was drowned, and we have been given new life in the Spirit.² In this new life, by the Spirit, we find the will and the strength to follow Jesus with undivided attention and unwavering conviction of our life as a living sacrifice to God.

We rejoice knowing that the tension we feel is a reminder of the new life we have in Christ. Heaven is our home. Because of our new life in Christ, we are strangers in this world. If we were not born again through water and the Word, we would care little about Christ's call. We would not feel the tension. That we feel the tension is a wonderful reminder that we have new life in Christ, and that new life, like a new patch of cloth sewn to an old garment, is tugging at the seams of our old life.

Finally, we rejoice because we were created to answer this call, to live lives focused on God, our Creator. You see, discipleship without singular focus, without sacrifice, without death - death to self and death to the flesh - is like salt that is no longer salty. **"Salt is good,"** Jesus says, **"However, if salt loses its taste, how will it be seasoned?"** ³⁵ **It is no good either for the soil or for the manure pile.** It serves no purpose and offers no benefit. It is time for us to stop sleepwalking through our life, being passive spectators of the work of the kingdom of God. As Jesus turned to the crowds that were following Him, He now turns to you and me, not to put a burden on our shoulders but to invite us to set free the life given to us in Baptism by focusing our life on following Jesus without fear of consequence or challenge.

Today, Jesus calls us with unflinching clarity to take up a life of unwavering devotion to Him and His kingdom mission, to surrender all as we take up our cross to follow Him. May we all heed that call. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

O Lord, we thank You for all Your goodness to us, but especially for the gift of Your Word and for the knowledge that we have of You through its message. We thank You for teaching us Your commandments, but, far more, we thank You for showing Yourself and Your limitless grace to us in Jesus Christ Your Son. Enable us to listen to Him in faith and to obey Him in love.

Send forth Your Word into our world today. Open doors of opportunity for us, and equip us to be active witnesses to Your Gospel, so that more and more may come to know Jesus Christ. Sow Your Word in the hearts and minds of people everywhere. Change their blindness to sight. Change their enslavement to sin, Satan, and death into the freedom that Christ alone gives.

Heavenly Father, let Your Word, as a living power, judge the thoughts and desires of our hearts. Increase our knowledge of what is good, and strengthen us to examine ourselves, amend our lives, and give up our pet sins. Grant that, through feeding on Jesus, the Son of Man, we may remain in Him, and He in us, and that, remaining in Him, we may be guided by His Word, and bring forth abundant fruit.

² Romans 6:1-11

Let Your Word shine in our homes, that parents and children may live together in love, serve one another in kindness, and experience true joy, both in this life and the one to come.

Give the Spirit of Christ to all who are facing sickness, sorrow, hardship or need. Grant that they may find You quick to strengthen and bless them, and lead them to praise You for doing everything well.

Continue to keep us by the power of Your Holy Spirit; comfort us by Your Gospel, and sustain us by Your love.

This we pray in the name of Jesus, who gave Himself for us, that we might live through Him, and praise You for ever and ever. Amen.

The 13th Sunday after Pentecost

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

¹⁵ “See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and calamity. ¹⁶ For I am commanding you today to love the LORD, your God, to walk in His Ways and to keep His Commandments, His Statutes and His Decisions, that you may live and become numerous and that the LORD, your God, may bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. ¹⁷ However, if your heart turns away and you do not listen but are led astray, worship other gods and serve them, ¹⁸ I have been telling you today that you people will certainly be ruined. You will not live for long in the land that you are crossing over the Jordan to enter and to possess. ¹⁹ I call on heaven and earth as witnesses against you today. I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Therefore, you shall choose life, that you and your descendants may live, ²⁰ that you may love the LORD, your God, that you may listen to what He says and cling to Him! For He is your life and your length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD has promised with an oath to give to your forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.”

Philemon 1-21

¹ Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our fellow-Christian, to Philemon, our dear fellow-worker, ² to Apphia, our sister in the faith, to Archippus, our fellow soldier, and to the church that meets in your house: ³ Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ!

⁴ I am always thanking my God when I mention you in my prayers, ⁵ because I hear about your love and faith, which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all God’s holy people. ⁶ I pray that the sharing of your faith may be effective, as you fully understand every good thing that is in us in Christ. ⁷ For your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because, brother, you have refreshed the hearts of God’s holy people.

⁸ Therefore, although in Christ I am so bold as to order you to do what you ought to do, ⁹ I prefer to appeal to you moved by love. I am appealing as Paul, an old man, and now a prisoner of Christ Jesus. ¹⁰ I am appealing to you about my son Onesimus, who has become my son while I have been in chains. ¹¹ Once he was useless to you but now has become useful both to you and to me. ¹² I am sending him back to you, and he is my very heart. ¹³ I would have liked to keep him with me that he might serve me on your behalf while I am in chains for the Good News. ¹⁴ However, I do not want to do anything without your consent, that you may not be

kind because you are compelled to be, as it were, but because you want to be. ¹⁵ For perhaps Onesimus left you for a while that you might have him back again for ever, ¹⁶ no longer as a slave but better than a slave, as a dearly loved brother. He is especially dear to me but how much dearer to you, both as a human being and in the Lord. ¹⁷ Now if you think of me as a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me! ¹⁸ If he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge it to me! ¹⁹ I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand: I shall pay it back. I do not want to mention that you owe me more than that, your own self. ²⁰ Yes, my fellow-Christian, I would like to have some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ! ²¹ As I write to you, I am confident that you will be obedient, since I know that you will do even more than I ask.

Luke 14:25-35

²⁵ Large crowds were travelling with Jesus. He turned to them and said, ²⁶ “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father, mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters, yes and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. ²⁷ Whoever does not carry his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. ²⁸ For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate what it will cost, to see if he has enough to finish it? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and cannot finish the building, all who watch him might begin to make fun of him, ³⁰ and say, ‘This man began to build but could not finish it.’ ³¹ Or what king, on his way to make war against another king, does not first sit down and consider whether with ten thousand men he can oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? ³² Otherwise, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation to ask for terms of peace. ³³ In the same way, therefore, whoever of you does not give up everything that he has cannot be My disciple. ³⁴ Therefore, salt is good. However, if salt loses its taste, how will it be seasoned? ³⁵ It is no good either for the soil or for the manure pile. People throw it away. He who has ears to hear should listen!”