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# The Cost of Discipleship

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A Sermon By

The Rev. Amanda A. Akes

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Grace Episcopal Church

Silver Spring, Maryland

*An audio version of this sermon can be found on the Grace Church website at*  
<http://graceepiscopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/2016-09-04-AAA.mp3>.

The Rev. Amanda A. Akes  
Grace Episcopal Church  
The Fifteenth Sunday After Pentecost  
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Deuteronomy 30:15-20  
Psalm 1

Philemon 1-21  
Luke 25-33

Just when we think Jesus is all about healing and love and proclaiming the good news of God's kingdom, he stuns with words that shock in their directness. "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" (Lk 14:26). The Greek word our text translates as "hate" is *miseo*. It is better understood as nonattachment. But even given this alternative translation, Jesus' teaching is not so easy to stomach. Jesus makes a bold statement about discipleship.

But before addressing Jesus' teaching on discipleship, let's first take into consideration the context in which his teaching was made. Jesus is on the road, traveling with large crowds. He is on his way to Jerusalem and has been for the last 5 chapters of Luke. The cross lies ahead of him. He knows, or at least suspects, that the cost of choosing to follow God will demand his all, including his life. Not because God wishes Jesus' death, but because the kingdom of God that Jesus preached was in stark opposition to the power structures of 1st century Palestine. This realization must have been ever present with Jesus as he traveled the way to Jerusalem. So it shouldn't be surprising that Jesus chose this time to address the crowds on the cost of discipleship. The time is ripe to help the crowd realize the demands of discipleship and to help them make assessments.

At this point in our gospel, the crowd is attracted to Jesus' healing presence and his teaching. They wish to be near him, to journey with him. What they may not know, however, is that to journey with Jesus is no light matter. They are drawn to Jesus because of his charisma, his message of God's grace, and his proclamation that God's kingdom belongs to people like them. To put it simply, they are spellbound by the magnificent rabbi. Jesus senses however, that they may have counted the kingdom assets, not taking into account the liabilities. And therefore, we hear Jesus address the responsibilities of discipleship, in what to our ears sound like, stark terms. The reason the terms are stark is because the crowd probably does not yet grasp the determination and single-mindedness discipleship requires. Jesus wished to give them an idea.

Without mincing his words, Jesus boldly declares that those who wished to be his disciples should not begin the journey with him unless they are willing to go all the way – committing themselves 100%. This commitment to Christ is not easy. It demands that disciples be willing to risk it all – everything – including family, possessions, and life itself, to follow Jesus. Jesus gives his would be followers a requirement to make family ties and normal self-preservation subordinate to following him. In this passage of scripture, Jesus declares that faithful discipleship is not for the lukewarm or for fair-weather friends. Faithful discipleship requires dedication.

Jesus then uses two analogies. One focuses on someone wishing to build a tower, and another tells of a king going to war. These analogies are meant to help members of the crowd understand that before they decide to be a disciple; they should carefully reflect and discern the costs of their decision. Discipleship is not to be entered into lightly or unadvisedly. It is not simply a matter of

pure religious passion, nor spiritual abandon. Jesus wants the crowd in its excitement to count the cost of what it means to follow him. According to one commentary I read, the term “cost” used in our gospel text today appears only once in the New Testament, and it is in this passage. Cost is what someone gives up to acquire, accomplish, maintain, or produce something. It involves a measure of sacrifice and perhaps a loss or penalty in gaining something.

Jesus wants his would be followers, both in antiquity and now, to know that Christian discipleship comes at a cost. It is not just one more hobby or extra-curricular activity to sign on to. Discipleship goes a step further than being a responsible human being and doing what is right. Following Jesus as his disciple along the way necessitates commitment and sacrifice.

This is not an easy message. Discipleship requires much. But its rewards are equally great. Jesus himself is our perfect example. He offered his all to God, even accepting death on the cross at the hands of the state and religious officials. But his story doesn't end in death. God raised Jesus from the dead, destroying death's conventional power. In raising Jesus to new life, God confirmed the truth of Jesus' life and teachings. This Jesus, whom God raised back to life, offers new life to his disciples, to those who would follow in his footsteps, continuing to bring his good news to his hurting and broken world.

Today we face the same dilemma that the crowds in our gospel lesson faced over two thousand years ago. Will we follow Jesus? Will we commit ourselves to his mission of making God's kingdom a reality on earth? We've heard Jesus' words regarding the potential cost of discipleship. We hear his warnings about conflicting allegiances. And although discipleship is not always in conflict with our other loyalties, sometimes it is and it requires a reordering of duties and affections that might normally claim first place. Is this something you're willing to sign on to?

My prayer is that the God who stirs this question in our hearts, may grant us the grace to assess the costs of discipleship, the strength to follow Jesus faithfully, and forgiveness when we fall short. Amen.