

Luke 14:25-33

²⁵Great crowds were traveling with him, and he turned and addressed them, ²⁶“If any one comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. ²⁷Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸Which of you wishing to construct a tower does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if there is enough for its completion? ²⁹Otherwise, after laying the foundation and finding himself unable to finish the work the onlookers should laugh at him ³⁰and say, ‘This one began to build but did not have the resources to finish.’ ³¹Or what king marching into battle would not first sit down and decide whether with ten thousand troops he can successfully oppose another king advancing upon him with twenty thousand troops? ³²But if not, while he is still far away, he will send a delegation to ask for peace terms. ³³In the same way, everyone of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple.

Context

The sequence of Sunday readings passes over Luke 14:15-24 regarding the invitation to the banquet. There Jesus tells a parable about those who take a banquet invitation too lightly and because of their casual attitude lose their own right to a share at the table and are replaced by others. This echoes Jesus’ lament over Jerusalem (13:31-35). There is an important connection between those verses and our reading. Jesus’ story of the great banquet (vv.15-24) introduces the possibility that ties to one’s possessions and family might bar, hinder or exclude one from enjoying the feast. Jesus lists those allegiances to family and possessions as impediments to authentic discipleship. Contra this cultural practice of familial allegiances, Jesus speaks of the necessity of a life transformed. These new practices must flow out of a transformed disposition reflecting new commitments, attitudes and new allegiances. That is, the conversion that characterizes genuine discipleship is itself generative, giving rise to new forms of being in the world.

Commentary

Many scholars tag these verses as “The cost of discipleship.” They are unique and peculiar to Luke, focusing on the total dedication necessary for the disciples of Jesus. It must be remembered that Jesus on the way to Jerusalem and has already predicted his death; so too should the disciples be prepared to leave all behind and make their commitment to the journey that will unfold before them.

It is here among the crowds of people that Jesus continues to teach discipleship to would-be disciples. Jesus makes no attempt to lure them, rather he makes clear that the way is not easy. Several phases reoccur in these verses:

“If any one comes to me [and does not] ... he cannot be my disciple” (v.26)

“Whoever does not ... cannot be my disciple.” (v.27)

“everyone of you who does ... cannot be my disciple.” (v.33)

The three conditions laid down concern renouncing family ties that would prevent one from becoming a disciple, bearing one’s cross, and forsaking possessions. Between the second and third sayings twin parables illustrate the folly of failing to consider the cost of an undertaking: the tower builder (vv.28-30) and the king going to war (vv.31-32). The form of the question points to the expected answer for each, “No one, of course” (cf. 11:5, 11; 14:5; 15:4, 17:7). Verse 33 is the conclusion: we must renounce all that keeps us from the fullness of discipleship.

Hating One’s Family?

Jesus’ command of love makes it unthinkable that he commands hating one’s family all the while

commanding to love those we do not know and are even our enemy. One should understand the Semitic hyperbole always uses stark differences so that the contrast is more clearly seen. The term *misein* (hate) denotes attitudes and modes of action rather than emotions. The point is not how one feels towards one's parents, but rather one's effective attitude when it comes to the kingdom. This becomes more clear in 16:13, "*No servant can serve two masters, he will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.*" This continues Luke 12:49-52 regarding division with the household caused by the proclamation of the reign of God.

In addition, this saying likely had a practical application in the lives of the first generation of Christians. The first generation of Christian missionaries and evangelists were highly itinerant. Discipleship entailed a willingness to leave home and family with minimal provisions (cf. 10:1-2; 18:29). The starkness of Jesus' language about "hate" makes clear that the choice itself is stark and demanding.

The demands of leaving behind familial ties in favor of right relationship to Jesus (v.26) as well as the demand to leave behind possessions that burden one from the fullness of the relationship with God (v.33) are not keyed to severing of family relationships or entering destitution, but rather ask a distancing from the high value that the culture places upon these things. The mere claim that one accepts Jesus and his teaching is a far cry from a radical shift in fundamental allegiances away from the culturally normative family and clan. For example, the teaching about invitations (vv. 12-14) makes clear that the cultural expectations and obligations of hosting and attending sets up a pattern of allegiances that makes a claim upon a person resulting in the exclusion of all outside the bounds of family, friends, and social/business peers. Discipleship demands a distancing from those norms to the norms of the Reign of God in which one openly invites those "outside the camp."

Just as Jesus has been reminding the Pharisees and scribes (vv.1-24) about the right behavior (orthopraxis) consistent with the Reign of God (belief as orthodoxy), so too are *the crowds* being reminded that the same is demanded of them – and it has implications and repercussions in one's life. The listeners are not encouraged to abhor their families, their parents, but to reform one's identity from service limited to the family/clan to an identity open in service to the Reign of God. In other words, to reorient oneself within the new community dedicated to God's purpose.

Carry His Own Cross

The expression *carry his own cross* is a metaphor of discipleship. In terms of dedication, one is to live as already condemned to death, "oblivious to the pursuit of noble status, find no interest in securing one's future via future obligations from others or by stockpiling possessions, free to identify with Jesus in his dishonorable suffering" [Green, 566].

Culpepper (293) presents a corrective to an interpretation of this phrase.

The language of cross bearing has been corrupted by overuse. Bearing a cross has nothing to do with chronic illness, painful physical conditions, or trying family relationships. It is instead what we do voluntarily as a consequence of our commitment to Jesus Christ. Cross bearing requires deliberate sacrifice and exposure to risk and ridicule in order to follow Jesus. This commitment is not just a way of life, however. It is a commitment to a person. A disciple follows another person and learns a new way of life.

Fools at Work and at War

These two parables are unique to Luke and are without parallel. Jesus draws attention to a simple observation: a prudent person would not begin a project until being sure it can be finished – neither a builder nor a king. In the first parable Jesus says, "Sit down and consider whether you can afford to follow me." In the second he says, "Sit down and surmise whether you can afford to refuse my

demands.” In the same way, God has not entered a redemptive process without being prepared to complete it. Jesus did not set his face to Jerusalem (9:51) knowing and being prepared for his own Passion.

The two parables move from the lesser to the greater. In the first, the threat is that of embarrassment before one’s peers and neighbors. In the second, the consequence is the defeat at the hands of an enemy. In continuing the movement to the even greater, the implication is that such assets as one’s network of family or simply membership in a religious tradition is inadequate to assure one’s status before God. What is required is fidelity to God’s only Son.

Habits of the Soul

Discipleship is thus an all-consuming vocation. It must be accepted with mature deliberation. Discipleship is not periodic volunteer work on one’s own terms and at one’s convenience. Yet what are the marks of discipleship?

Brian Stoffregen notes that in the book *Power Surge*, Mike Foss lists “six marks of discipleship for a changing church” which he expects members to practice. They are:

- daily prayer
- weekly worship
- Bible reading and study
- service in and beyond the congregation
- spiritual friendships – inviting others to the faith and passing on the faith
- giving time, talents, and resources

As Catholic we would include celebrating the Sacraments as part of weekly worship. That being said, what are your habits of the soul that open you to the wonder and mystery of God’s active presence in your lives, that keep you focused; that fix your attention on the things of God?

Notes

Luke 14:25 *traveling with him*: The journey on the road to Jerusalem continues. That *great crowds* followed him may be held to support the view that he was travelling through Nazareth. But Luke does not say where this teaching took place, only that Jesus *turned* (cf. 7:9; 9:55; 10:23; 22:61; 23:28) and spoke to the crowds.

Luke 14:26 *hating his father*: The language here is strong – Matthew softens the text with “*to love more than*.” The term *misein* (hate) denotes attitudes and modes of action rather than emotions. The point is not how one feels towards one’s parents, but rather one’s effective attitude when it comes to the kingdom. This becomes more clear in 16:13, “*No servant can serve two masters, will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.*” The OT is also quite stark pointing out the priority of God over familial bonds (cf. Ex 32:27-29; Deut 33:9; 1 Kings 19:19-21)

Hate is a Semitic expression meaning “to turn away from, to detach oneself from,” rather than our animosity-laden understanding. In Genesis, we read in one verse that Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah (29:30), but in the next verse, it literally says that Leah was hated (“unloved” in NRSV, see also v. 33). Leah was not hated like we usually use the word, but Jacob simply loved her less than he loved Rachel. Jacob didn’t have an intense dislike for Leah. In fact, he had seven children with her after these verses!

How does one understand Jesus’ word especially in the light of the commandment “Honor your father and mother” (Exod. 20:12; Deut. 5:16). Some scholars argue that 14:26 constitutes the annulment of

the commandment, while others point out that this is unlikely in the light of Luke 16:17 (*It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for the smallest part of a letter of the law to become invalid*) and that the rabbis were well aware of the fact that the Torah sometimes presented conflicting claims, a situation that did *not* entail a deconstruction of Torah but the subordination of one commandment to another. Jesus' requirement has been explained as echoing Deut. 33:9, where Levi's devotion to the Torah is highlighted. Levi is reported to have said of his father and mother, "I regard them not," because "he ignored his kin, and did not acknowledge his children; for they observed your word, and kept your covenant." The fact that Deut. 33:9 is quoted in Jewish texts suggests that Jesus' stipulation does not contradict Torah.

Luke 14:27 *not carry his own cross*: Luke's use of *heautou* (his own) stresses the need for a personal acceptance of the role. Understood here is the each of Luke 9:23 "*If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.*" Although we read about Simon of Cyrene carrying a cross, the words used for his actions (*airo* in Mt and Mk and *phero* in Luke) are different than the word in this text (*bastazo*).

Luke 14:29 *unable to finish*: in the narrow door text (Lk 13:22-24), the seeker is not strong enough to enter through the narrow door. Here the builder is unable (lit. "not strong enough") to finish the building. When we can finally admit that "I can't," then we are open to God's "I can".

Luke 14:31 *king...another king advancing upon him*: this recalls the battle between the kingdoms suggested in Luke 11:18-20

***ask for peace terms*:** literally, "ask for the things leading to peace."

Luke 14:33 *renounce all his possessions*: The word translated "renounce" is *apotasso*. The other occurrence of this word in Luke comes in 9:61 another would-be followers says, "I will follow you, Lord, but first let me say farewell to my family at home." Usually *apotasso* is translated, "farewell" or "good-bye".

Sources

Commentaries

R. Allen Culpepper *Luke*, vol. 9 in *New Interpreter's Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN.: Abington, 1995)

Joel Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, vol. 3 of *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Gordon Fee (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1997)

Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, vol. 3 of *Sacra Pagina*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991) pp. 228-33

Jerome Kodell, "Luke" in *The Collegeville Bible Commentary*, eds. Diane Bergant and Robert J. Karris (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1989) p.963

Leon Morris, *Luke: An introduction and commentary*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries Vol. 3: (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988) pp. 253-4

Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1997) pp. 563-8

R. Alan Culpepper, *Luke* in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. IX (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995) pp. 291-4

G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007) p. 340

Brian Stoffregen, “Brian P. Stoffregen Exegetical Notes” at www.crossmarks.com

Scripture – Scripture quotes from *New American Bible* by Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, DC. © available at <http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/index.shtml>