

13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
Year C  
Luke 14:25-35  
“Jesus is of First Importance”

Goal: That the hearers may be bound more closely to their Baptism so that they might will and desire to live according to the Cross of Jesus.

Luke 14:35, Jesus says, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

Have you ever heard the television or radio announcements that say, “This is a test of the emergency broadcast system”? Sure you have, and you know what follows next—a loud blaring sound that has you scrambling for the remote control or radio dial to turn it down.

Obviously, it’s loud to get your attention. If it was a real emergency, you would listen to and heed the message that followed. You would take the appropriate action for your own and the safety of your family.

Today’s Gospel reading from Luke 14 is a lot like the loud blare from the emergency broadcast system. Jesus’ words grab your attention. In them, we are faced with two options—we can turn Him down, or we can heed what He says. You see, this text is about relationship—what it means to be a follower, a disciple of One who dies on the Cross.

(Pause) I want to set the stage for today’s sermon by saying this—the Gospel dominates. Christ crucified and risen for our forgiveness and salvation has been granted to us by the Holy Spirit in the waters of Baptism and through the hearing of the Word.

Why do I say this to you? For one, studies have shown that you, the hearers, only hear about 20 percent of what I might say to you in a sermon. That’s not only scary for you, but it’s really scary for me! What are you really hearing coming out of my mouth?

So again—hear today’s reading from Luke 14 as Gospel, as gift, as what Christ has done for you. Hear it as those whose lives have been taken over by the Holy Spirit.

How do we then live our lives in Christ through the working of the Holy Spirit? The Holy Scriptures speak of the Christian's life as the life that we've been given in our Baptism's. We live our lives in the forgiveness of sins. We live our lives fully knowing whose we are and where we're going. In other words, we live our lives as the baptized.

As the baptized children of God, we "walk" in the "way" of God. Notice how this connection is made in today's Old Testament and Psalm reading. Deuteronomy 30:16, "If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you today, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping the commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it."

The way of life is "walking in God's ways" and "keeping His commandments." When the baptized do this with the Spirit's help, we are "holding fast" to God (Deut. 30:20). This life is one of blessing. Psalm 1:1-2, "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night."

It sounds easy, doesn't it—to walk in the way of the Lord? Then why is it so hard for us to do this? All we have to do is to point to our sinful human natures. Paul was so right when he said, "The good I want to do, I can't, because evil is right there with me" (Rom. 7:19). By nature, we are directly opposed to walking in the way of the Lord. That's why we need to hear our reading from Luke 14 in terms of what it looks like in the life of the baptized.

(Pause) The context of Luke 14 tells us that Jesus is still journeying to Jerusalem. As Jesus travels to die on the Cross, He teaches, and what a teaching He gives today! Following Him entails great sacrifice. Discipleship comes at a cost, and there are three "shocking" statements—loud blaring noises—that Jesus makes.

The first is given in Luke 14:26, “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.” Did you hear the loud blaring noise? Jesus says you must “hate” your family to be His follower. These words jar our ears!

What does Jesus mean here? Does He truly mean that we are to “hate” our family? This language of “hate” corresponds to the phrase “not love more than.” In other words, we are “not to love our family more than” Jesus and His kingdom. Jesus is showing that one’s true family is first and foremost the family of God. Membership into this family is by means of baptism and teaching.

Do you remember Jesus’ words in Matthew 28:19-20? “Go and make disciples of all nations by baptizing....and teaching.” What the Greek language really says is that we are “to baptize in order to teach.” You can’t separate Jesus’ mandate. Those who are baptized must also be taught.

So, if one sees God’s family of first importance, then everything else follows—fear and love of God naturally gives way to love of family and of others. In Luke 8:21, Jesus says, “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.”

(Pause) The second loud, blaring statement of Jesus comes in Luke 14:27, “Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.”

Jesus has already made a similar statement in Luke 9:23, where He says that disciples are to “deny themselves and take up His cross daily and follow Him.” You see, walking with Jesus as a disciple is a daily event. Every day we face the burdens as people who follow the One who walked the road to death. Rejection and persecution will be and are a part of the Christian life.

That's why Jesus calls on us to "count the cost" (14:28). Now, He talks about "building" and "going to war," but the theme remains the same—what does it mean to be a disciple of someone who dies on the Cross? What is our relationship with Him?

Those who would journey with Jesus are warned to first sit down, count the cost, and know what they lose and what they gain when going with Him. Yes, there are consequences in following Christ—persecution, rejection, temptation. The devil will attack us in many and various ways so that we will want to put down the fight and quit.

But, take heart! You see, baptized into Christ we are crucified to the world and the world to us. Disciples of Jesus lose the world but gain heaven. So, in this sinful world we will most assuredly bear our daily crosses, but we are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus being the Chief Cornerstone (Eph. 2:20)!

This is the call to repentance and faith. Each day we repent and confess our many sins in thought, word, and deed. And each day, we receive the blood-bought forgiveness of Christ given to us in our Baptism's. What joy! What assurance! What peace we have as followers of someone who dies on the Cross!

(Pause) The final loud, blaring statement that Jesus gives this morning is recorded in Luke 14:33. "Any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."

Here, Jesus addresses possessions. You see, throughout Jesus' way to the Cross, both possessions and hypocrisy are stumbling blocks for the Pharisees. So, it should come as no surprise that possessions cause Jesus' disciples to stumble as well.

What might that look like in our day? Pride? Self-interest? Living only for today? Neglecting the care of God's people? Not returning to Him our first-fruits, that is, a proportionate amount of what He has first given to us? No doubt, Jesus wants us to see and value the proper use of possessions.

In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus gives this warning to the seed that was sown among the thorns and became choked by it. Luke 8:14, “And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.”

The key to survival is perseverance, steadfastness, endurance, in the Word of God. Holding fast to the Word with persevering faith is necessary. That is the reason that we gather together as the community of believers to hear God’s Word and receive His Supper.

But Jesus is far more than just a good model or example for us to follow—He alone, through the working of the Holy Spirit, makes it possible for us to now respond in faith and bear good fruit. As He lives in us through Word and Sacrament and in the life and ministry of His Church, He faithfully holds us in His hands and keeps us steadfast in the faith.

(Pause) I’m going to be honest with you: today’s text should shock you. It should cause you to re-evaluate your relationship with Jesus. What is first in my life? What takes precedence? What sin needs to be repented of as I daily follow the One who dies on a Cross?

I cannot answer those questions for you. But, I can lovingly teach and proclaim to you what it might look like in our lives individually and in our lives together. Why? Because through the gift of faith, you have been given “ears to hear” (14:35).

Yes, the road to heaven always leads through Calvary. God has sent His Son Jesus to do all things well for us. He is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in time of need. We are forgiven. We are the very heirs of heaven. We are salt to those we are around. We are not disciples of Jesus in name only. What does that look like in my life now? Amen.