

Sermon Notes: Sept 8, 2019 **Focus:** Counting the cost of following God in Luke 14
[Lectionary Readings for September 8](#)

Here we have yet another untidy story from Jesus: *"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. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.... what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions."*

This might sound familiar, if you remember August 18th's Gospel reading. (I know that assumes a lot!) In that previous reading, Jesus seems to relish divisions between father and son; between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law. But like that previous Sunday, the punchline today is the same: following Jesus is the first priority, even over and above family. I am not going to kid you, this is something I am still working on, and am far from achieving.

This teaching seems to be a weird mix of high calling and unusual calculus. Your first reaction to these words might be, "Whatever... this is so unrealistic - who is going to give up family and money in favor of suffering?" Or, you are wondering how two warring kings are related to giving up your possessions. For 99.8% of us, we need a way to make sense of this text. First, let's see this teaching as Parable. Parables are over-the-top teachings that are meant to jar and shock you. There is a war going on in our hearts, so it's worth sitting down and considering the battle field.

- What relationship(s) are you willing to let go of or redefine in order to be free? What are you willing to fight for in order that you and others might be free?
- How much will that cost you? Could you be willing...to be willing to consider... the cost? Furthermore, how much does business as usual cost you already?

No one gets out of this free. Something will demand everything of you. If that something is not God, you will get sucked dry:

- Work comes first -- then you retire without meaningful connections.
- Raise a family because children are everything -- then they stop talking to you.
- Start a charity because love has to be engaged -- then you hate how much it thanklessly demands.

So, even our virtuous and highest aspirations are hollow without a God-shaped focus. But, by grace we can be alive and loose. Jesus says - hate your family; however, I think he really just wants us to hold family loosely while we have them. To underline this point, go back in a time machine with me to 1979. There we are listening to the exceptionally hairy 1970's band - 38 special. As they sing hold on loosely, let it wash over you: [check out the video if you want a real flashback or see bad 1970's hair for the first time.](#)

*You see it all around you, good lovin' gone bad, and usually it's too late when you realize what you had. My mind goes back to a girl I left some years ago who told me: just **hold on loosely but don't let go, if you cling to tightly you're gonna lose control.***



Fellow control freaks, worrywarts and overachievers - hold your father and mother, partner and children, brother and sister, and even life itself loosely.

Maybe Jesus is more kind than he sounds What if you heard Jesus trying to shake you out of your small minded thinking? If you think your busy life is God's best intent for you, you're probably wrong. That thing you prize as the best, might be a form of addiction. There are so many ways to be miserable and addicted while you thinking you are doing your best, but there are far fewer ways to grace and freedom. Tolstoy wrote in Anna Karenina: "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." Narrow is the "holding on loosely" way.

Work trap is a common trap and false religion. The modern spin on this bait-and-switch is "find a job you love, and you'll never work a day in your life." Gag me. Don't get me wrong, I am truly blessed to be your priest, but my vocation is not center of me. There is an excellent article about a phenomena called "workism," where your job is supposed to

be your center of meaning. I know what you are thinking, "This is not a new phenomena!" However, I think the modern flavor of workism is particularly insidious. [Here is a link to an excellent article in the Atlantic about workism.](#) Read it, especially if you really hate your job; and feel like you are *supposed* to find a mythical meaning in work that will fulfill your deepest needs.

Take up your cross Even if your life is relatively free of suffering, you're not off the hook. What we are 'selling' our kids and grandkids is hurting them. We are telling them that if they try hard enough, they can have a cross-free life. I think we are making our children deeply anxious by declaring "You can do anything!" I think this actually injects grief into them. This pious acclamation implies that anything short of 100% fulfillment is a result of their miscalculation and/or moral failure - the wrong tutor, school, mentor, etc, it's all their fault for not feeling work bliss and self actualization.

Life is theirs for the taking! For some that is true, but *all* our kids will suffer and fail at some point. Can we hold this loosely too? Don't get me wrong, I don't think we should go back to station wagons and no seatbelts, but we can back off some from the pressure cookers that we allow them to live in. I don't want to disrespect success, but maybe we can stop pedaling find-a-job-you-love-and-you'll-never-work-a-day-in-your-life [There is a great article on millennial nuns \(a bit of a rabbit trail\)](#)

C.S. Lewis - his take on priorities - Joyful Christian C.S. spent years trying to figure out how to hold on loosely. I think his overall approach to life and his writings are a great filter for us. He writes in the *Joyful Christian* "Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you get neither." That approach is not a guaranteed success, but aiming at earth is a guaranteed heartbreak. I absolutely believe that God is not trying to spoil our fun, but it just seems that what we count as fun is killing our joy.. God wants us to have life giving relationships with family and friends, but also a strong constitution to deal gracefully with suffering, isolation, and failure.

More C.S. Lewis - when we look the wrong way - Great Divorce Of all of CS Lewis's writings, *The Great Divorce* is my favorite. I like Chronicles of Narnia, Mere Christianity was decent, Surprised by Joy was meaningful. But I *love* the Great Divorce. **Summary of the book** there is a bus that regularly comes down from heaven to pick up from hell anyone who wants to come. The only requirement is that they stay. They can go back to hell if they choose. Most don't stay in heaven. In this short book, Chapter 11 really hit home for me.

Chap 11 - two characters - 1st is a ghost/human with a lizard There's a ghost in Chapter 11 with a lizard on his shoulder who never shuts up. Everytime the man is invited to "higher and deeper" toward God the lizard frantically tries to convince the man that they will die or God will kill the lizard if they go up the mountain. When the ghost/man finally turns to the mountain, the lizard becomes a strong stallion, and they gallop up the hill together. (The lizard is a stand in for human lust.) Once the man stopped giving lust his undivided attention it became a holy, transformed force driving him closer to God



2nd is the "Tragedian on a leash" We meet a man who has a leash attached to an outsized melodramatic persona (The tragedian is stand-in for who the man wants to become but isn't). Every time the human rattles this tragedian/ caricature's chain. the human shrinks while the prop grows. The human eventually becomes so small that all you see is the false personae / tragedian. The man disappears into his own false aspirations and outsized ambitions. I think either we give ourselves to God who makes us full and strong, or we can devote ourselves to something else that will shrink us down to nothing.

Something I've said before that bears repeating... We will worship something -- work, video games, pizza, family etc. but the only thing in all the world that will fill us with strength is God. It may cost us something in process, but every false thing costs too much.

Todd

In the sermon, I refer to oxherding pictures the source link is here.
<https://tricycle.org/magazine/ten-oxherding-pictures/>