



Sunday September 4, 2022
Luke 14:25-33 (Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost)

Ascension Lutheran Church
Pastor Tony Acompanado

Are you ready for some football! We're only 7 days, 5hrs and approximately 25 minutes away from the Green Bay Packers regular season kickoff next Sunday! And what about that exciting blowout win by the Wisconsin Badgers last night – WOW! Football in Wisconsin is so much more than just a sport. I'd even go so far as to say that for some it's a way of life – their schedules revolve around it, their mood is affected by it, and their wardrobe is often determined by it. In some ways it's almost like a religion. There are some who even begin to indoctrinate their children with football theology the moment they're born. And like it or not, every Wisconsinite, it doesn't matter if they were born here or transplanted here, at some point they'll have to declare their team loyalty.

But football fans in general tend to do some crazy things. We'll pack up our cars and head to the parking lot of our favorite team so we can grill out and watch the game on our cell phone or listen over the radio when we could've done the same thing at home on our own patio.

Fans are finicky too aren't they. When things are going good for their team they flock to the stands to cheer them on. But, when things aren't going so well then they're quick to criticize every play. They bad mouth players and coaches. They talk about the way it used to or should be. Fans tend to come in waves – they feed on the excitement and vanish when the difficult times come.

The sad truth is...too many Christians today resemble football fans. They rally around the excitement, and they run from the hard work. They encourage in the good times and criticize when things aren't going so well. They fill the pews and wait to be entertained.

It's sad to say, but Jesus understood this all too well. In today's Gospel we find him on his way to Jerusalem and a large crowd has gathered around Him. And when Jesus saw this crowd he didn't waste any time or pull any punches. Essentially he turned to them and said, "I'm not looking for fans; I'm looking for followers."

And today Jesus is saying the very same thing to us. It's easy to be a fan. Fans are here today and gone tomorrow. But following...that takes commitment...and sacrifice. Unfortunately many churches today are filled with fans rather than followers. There are people who fill the pews that are fans of the beautiful building they gather in – or fans of the pastor, or musician, or the good feeling they leave with. And then there are those who are even fans of Jesus but haven't quite made the commitment to become followers of Jesus.

But according to Jesus words in today's Gospel, it's time to declare our loyalty. It's time for us to decide if we're going to be his fan or his follower.

Where this gets challenging is, most of us don't mind Jesus making a few minor changes in our lives but Jesus wants to turn our lives upside down. Fans don't mind him doing a little touch-up work, but Jesus wants complete renovation. Fans come to Jesus thinking tune-up, but Jesus is thinking overhaul. Fans think a little makeup is fine, but Jesus is thinking makeover. Fans think a little redecorating is okay, but Jesus wants a complete remodel. Fans want Jesus to inspire them, but Jesus wants to interfere with their lives.

Before we can do this though, we first have to realize that there's a cost to following 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."

Wait? What? Did I read that correctly? Did Jesus just tell us that if we wanted to follow Him that we had to hate those who were closest to us? If so, then this seems to be the complete opposite of what we've been told about God. The Bible tells us that "God is love." And Jesus has told us time and time again that we must love one another. Yet here we have Jesus telling us that we must hate in order to follow Him.

To comprehend this we must first understand that the Bible isn't contradicting itself. We must realize that these statements are making a comparison. Yes, God is love, and yes we're supposed to love one another. Jesus was clear about this when he summed up the Ten Commandments with two statements about our love for God and our love for our neighbor. However, in today's text Jesus is saying that if you want to be my follower then you must love me more than anything or anybody.



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He's saying that when you compare your love for me and your love for every other relationship you have it should appear as though your love for me is so much greater than your love for anything or anybody else that it seems that you hate them in comparison to me.

However, hating your family would contradict the other teachings of Jesus. So why then does Jesus use such strong language? This is why context is so important. Maybe Jesus uses such dramatic language here, because in the ancient culture of his time if you were to become a follower without your family's blessing, you would've been thought of as hating your family. So, a decision to follow Jesus would've been interpreted as turning your back on your family and walking away from them.

The word hate is defined as "to dislike something intensely" or to "have feelings of intense hostility." So, clearly Jesus doesn't want us to "hate" our family in that sense because that would violate everything else the Bible teaches us about love. A more accurate understanding of what Jesus is saying is, essentially, "love me more." The word hate may seem to us as excessively harsh, but in a way it's also accurate because it conveys the degree to which Jesus wants us to love him more.

But like I said earlier, being a follower comes with a cost. Unfortunately, when it comes to our life of faith we want to have our cake and eat it too. But we can't. We want to embrace a faith that doesn't involve costly choices. We want to experience Jesus the healer, friend, and savior – but not so much Jesus the radical, counter-cultural prophet who questions our priorities.

Jesus doesn't sugarcoat his message in order to sell it. He doesn't cut corners, and he doesn't soften the blow. He tells it like it is. And how is it? It's like this: if we want to follow Jesus, then everything we do – every choice we make, every thing we cherish, every idol we worship, every possession we hoard...they're all secondary...a distant and incomparable second.

To say that this teaching of Jesus is hard is a laughable understatement. Jesus knows it's hard, so he advises his listeners to stop and count the costs before they sign up to be his followers. A careful builder, he says, never breaks ground without taking a good, hard look at her budget. A wise general doesn't declare war unless he's sure his troops are equipped and battle-ready.

Well, our life of faith shouldn't be any different, because discipleship isn't a weekend hobby. It's a full mind, body, and soul endeavor that requires us to surrender and reorder our priorities. It involves uncertainty and the fear of where our commitment will lead and what it will require of us...to give up, to push aside, to "hate". The bottom line is Jesus doesn't want our divided affection or our divided attention.

But here's the thing. If we're willing to commit everything we are and everything we hold dear to the purpose of following Jesus, God will be faithful to do what he has promised. God has already offered us his entire Kingdom and the gift of eternal life with him.

The cost is high, but the cost of not following Jesus is even higher. Theologian Dallas Willard in his book, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, considers that the cost of non-discipleship is even higher than the cost of following Jesus. He says, "Yes, Jesus asks us to leave everything else behind, to make him our first priority, but what price do we pay if we decide to not follow Jesus? What is the cost of refusing to be a true disciple?"

"Non-discipleship costs abiding peace, a life penetrated throughout by love, faith that sees everything in the light of God's overriding governance for good, hopefulness that stands firm in the most discouraging of circumstances, power to do what is right and withstand the forces of evil. In short, it costs exactly that abundance of life Jesus said he came to bring."

My friends, the cost is great, but the cost of not following Jesus is even greater. The choice is ours. I'd like to point out one more thing. In the original Greek translation, the invitation that Jesus offers in today's Gospel text begins with "if anyone". It turns out that anyone means, ANYONE. Anyone means me. Anyone means you. No qualifiers of who you are, where you've been, or what you've done. Just an invitation to follow him and receive the abundant and everlasting life that he promises. So, what will you choose – will you be a fan or will you be a follower. Thanks be to God! Amen.