

The 12th Sunday after Trinity, 7 September 2025, Proper 12

Readings: Deuteronomy 30.15-end, Luke 14:25-33

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen. (Psalm 19.14)

Today's Gospel reading from St Luke's gospel which we are being called upon to sit with is a disturbing one for Christians, no matter how long in the tooth we are. It leaves us asking questions about what Jesus meant and our own attitude to the Christian faith, our commitment level to living that which we confess with our lips and believe in our hearts. I find myself wanting, coming up short, as I listen to Jesus' words to the crowds, then and today with you now in Christian assembly.

Jesus begins with a shocker! 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. What does this mean? I will return to it in later as Jesus doesn't leave it there; instead, he follows up with two more sayings, which do nothing to soften the blow of the first, but draw the noose tighter. He says one, "Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." and two, "None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions."

There is much to say about these three sayings, and in the course of this sermon, I might just do that, but before proceeding, it is worth noting that the sayings are connected. There are three, perhaps four, areas of life Jesus addresses through these sayings, and each is of immediate and existential importance to us. He begins with familial relationships using the word hate. This is no doubt a strong word. He continues with how we are to value life itself coupled with the importance of taking up our cross, and finally, the place of possessions in the life of a disciple.

This gospel episode is often entitled ***“Counting the Cost”*** because of the two examples Jesus provides. Behind these strong words, these hard sayings of Jesus, if we sit long enough with them and Jesus, we find the honest, but exacting pastor he is. He is asking, Do you know what will be required of you if you are going to be one of my disciples? Let me spell it out for you, so that you are under no illusion about what you are letting yourself in for. It is going to cost you. So, like a king before he goes to war, I beg you to weigh up the cost before joining me. It is demanding to be one of my disciples. He doesn’t say it here, but it is a way of life that, in the end, the cost, although demanding, is little in comparison to the great prize that is ours in knowing God in Christ Jesus, of being recipients of the blessings and activities of the Holy Spirit. Our future secured. But it is going to cost. Jesus cannot pretend otherwise. He must spell it out for the sake of honesty and in order to be utterly transparent. And we will see that as Jesus goes towards the cross, his followers begin to fall away. The irony is that elsewhere in the gospels, in Matthew to be precise, we hear Peter as the disciples’ spokesman coming to Jesus and saying, “We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?” (Matthew 19.27) Did Peter really count the cost? Luke commenting on Peter’s calling relates, “Then Jesus said to Simon, ‘Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.’ When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.” (Luke 5.10-11)

The other example Jesus provides concerning ***“Counting the Cost”*** is about building a house. Many of us will be familiar, perhaps not with building a house or owning an apartment, but we all know whether we rent a small flat, even but a room, we need to stay within our budget; otherwise, we are going to fail and have a lot of Ärger, hassle. Sure, we would like so many square metres more, and so many rooms more and a view of the Danube, of the Viennese vineyards, or the Stephansdom, and, and, and, but we know enough to count the cost and order our affairs accordingly, or at least most of us do, I trust, and all most likely would like to. Lucille was telling me of

a man (Did it have to be a man?) who has too many credit cards and a crippling debt of 200,000. At least I think it is crippling.

This Gospel episode comes as a package and it addresses important and immediate aspects of our life, beginning with life itself, addressing relationships, especially family relationships, and our possessions, and finally, nicely embedded, our vocation as Christians, which will always include a call to take up our cross daily. You will know that I am transitioning out of paid ministry and I see the challenge of this passage, especially in its call to take up my cross, whatever that may come to look like in the years that are still granted to me and all of us here on earth.

The key, or a key, to putting this gospel in perspective is afforded by the Summary of the Law with its paramount calling, as we already heard at the beginning of today's service in the first part of the Summary of the Law, "The first commandment is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.'"

In our lives, God, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, Advocate and Guide, is to have first place. God so loved the world,... All else flows from it. It follows that all our relationships are to be under God and they are to be ordered accordingly. In this is freedom. No relationship, however dear, is to usurp our relationship to God, not even that of our parents, whom we are to honour, nor our partner, our spouse, our children, our employer, our friend, our teacher, our Doktorvater or Doktormutter, and certainly no despots or would-be despots, none of these to take the place of God.

In loving God, we learn to love others but also to hate any false complicity with them, forsaking Christ and betraying him, aligning ourselves with the world rather than the life that God is calling us into.

Christ through the cross has ploughed for us a furrow that leads to life in God now and forever. It is not always an easy way, I grant, but, and for this I turn to John's Gospel, who records Jesus as saying, "I have not come into world to condemn the world, but that the world might have life through me." To be aligned with and a part of this redeeming work of God made known in and through Christ and ever realised through the Holy Spirit is what we are always called to be a part of. How did Isaiah phrase it, "See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland."

Let us bless the Lord! **Thanks be to God!**