

Dust

Luke 14:25-35

Rev. Jeff Chapman ~ February 24, 2019 ~ Faith Presbyterian Church

²⁵ Now large crowds were traveling with him; and he turned and said to them, ²⁶ “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. ²⁷ Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸ For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, ³⁰ saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ ³¹ Or 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? ³² If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. ³³ So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

³⁴ “Salt is good; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? ³⁵ It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; they throw it away. Let anyone with ears to hear listen!” (Luke 14:25-35, NRSV)



How many of you have memorized the mission statement of our church? It’s only 8 words. We all should have it memorized. We should offer a prize. I’ll tell you what, if you memorize our church’s mission statement you will win free coffee every Sunday after worship here for the rest of your life. How about that for motivation! If you prefer tea we can provide that.

Let’s say it together: *A community loving Christ, building disciples, serving all.* We kept it really simple because God keeps it simple. Just three things. We are to love Christ first. We are to make disciples who follow Jesus. We are to serve people around us in this world, whoever they are. For many years now our leadership has believed that if we, by God’s grace, can do these three things we will be the church God calls us to be.

This morning I want to focus on that middle part of our mission, the part about making disciples. We know this is the central part of the mission of the church because

Jesus told us so. The very last words Jesus spoke before he ascended to heaven were these words:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.¹

The church later called this *The Great Commission* because it spells out the most important task Christ left for the church to do after the resurrection, which is to make disciples. For this reason our leaders, along with many of you, have been wrestling for some time now with how we as a congregation can actually carry out these marching orders Jesus gave us. How can we build disciples who, once they are baptized, live in obedience to everything Jesus taught us.

Let’s look for a minute at the word *disciple*. It’s a word that is used at least 230 times in the Gospels. In Hebrew the word for disciples is *talmadim*. In ancient Israel rabbis had *talmadim*. These were men who left basically everything, even their families, to study and follow the ways of their teacher or rabbi. But discipleship in that world involved much more than being a student. The goal of a disciple wasn’t just to *know* what the rabbi knew, but to *become like the rabbi* in every way.

For this reason, rabbis in Jesus’ day were very selective. Only the best and brightest were chosen as disciples because the task was intense. When a rabbi determined that a young man had what it took to be a disciple, he would say to that young man, “Come, follow me.” In response, the young man would leave his family, his synagogue, his village, his friends, and devote his entire life to learning how to live life just like the rabbi lived life.

A 2nd century rabbi named Yose ben Yoezer was famous for saying to his disciples, “Cover yourself with the dust of your rabbi’s feet.” That gets at the crux of it. When a rabbi walked through town his disciples would follow right behind him, sticking so close to his every move

¹ Matthew 28:18-20 (NRSV)

that by the end of the day they would be covered with the dust from his feet.²

When Jesus took on a disciple this is exactly what he was asking of that person, that he or she would follow him through life not only to learn what he knew but to do what he did, to take on his character, to live life as he would live life if he were in their shoes. This is what Paul is getting at in Romans 8:29 when he writes that Christians are to be “conformed to the image of [God’s] Son.” He echoes this in Ephesians 4:13 when he says we are to attain “the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” In a word, Christians are men and women who are following Jesus so closely in every aspect of life that we end up covered in the dust of Jesus’ feet.

With this in mind, consider the passage we just read. The teaching Jesus offers here is initiated by the fact that there are large crowds traveling with Jesus. Notice that Luke doesn’t tell us that there were large crowds *following* Jesus. This isn’t a crowd of disciples, but a crowd of people who are *hanging around* with Jesus, and Jesus needed to make a clear distinction between the two.

In our terms let me put it this way: a churchgoer is not necessarily the same as a disciple. You see, in those days lots of people hung around Jesus, associated with Jesus, sat and listened to Jesus’ teachings, went to Jesus when they needed help, and even identified themselves as friends of Jesus, but they were not disciples. Same today. I have a picture in my mind of the person who sticks a plastic Jesus on his dashboard. He’s *traveling* with Jesus but not necessarily following Jesus as closely as true discipleship demands. He’s not getting covered in much dust. Truth is, because there have always been lots people traveling with Jesus, he is constantly having to turn around to make clear to the crowds, even to us this morning, that it’s disciples, not traveling companions, that he’s after. He doesn’t want to be on our dashboard; he wants the dust of his feet to cover our lives. He could not be more clear about what this means than he is here. To be a Christian is to be a disciple, and to be a disciple is to give your total allegiance to Christ in every aspect of life.

Recently I was at an event where we all said the Pledge of Allegiance together. It has been a long time since I said those words, though I remember saying them every morning to begin the school day when I was a kid. When I say them now there is a part in there that always catches my attention. It’s the word allegiance. Here’s the definition of that word: “loyalty or

commitment of a subordinate to a superior or of an individual to a group or cause.” The word implies exclusive commitment and loyalty. I pledge allegiance to the United States of America, and not to Brazil, or South Africa, or Canada. That’s what the pledge means. It’s exclusive in nature.

Similarly, and even more so, Jesus demands from his disciples total allegiance, total commitment, total loyalty. It’s why Christians call him Lord. His Lordship is to take precedence over every aspect of our lives. To give us a picture of what this looks like, Jesus here gives three specific examples and, in doing so, challenges what might be the three competing allegiances in our lives.

First, our allegiance to Christ is to precede our allegiance to family. In verse 26 he declares, **“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.”** To be clear, the word ‘hate’ is used here differently than the way we would use it. In fact, Jesus can’t mean that we are to despise our own family because he says elsewhere, and scripture makes clear at many places, that we are to love and honor our families. For instance, Paul writes in I Timothy 5:8, **“And whoever does not provide for relatives, and especially for family members, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”**

You see, the word ‘hate’ Luke uses here calls to mind an ancient Semitic expression that meant ‘to turn away from’ or ‘to detach from’. So what Jesus is saying here is that if we follow him our devotion to him must be higher than our devotion even to our most cherished human relationships. My commitment to Christ must run deeper even than my commitment to my wife or to my kids. Keeping in mind that Jesus commands his disciples to honor marriage and cherish their families, it’s also true that if staying close to Jesus leads you away from your family than you must stay close to Jesus. That’s what he’s saying here. And if we are not willing to give Christ this sort of allegiance above even our own families, he says that we then cannot be his disciples.

Second, our allegiance to Christ is to precede our allegiance to our own self-interests and personal well-being. In verse 27 he says, **“Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”** You see, all these people traveling with Jesus thought this was a parade, and everybody loves a parade. But this was not a parade but a funeral procession.³ Where is Jesus headed? He’s headed at this point to Jerusalem

² I’m relying heavily here on Rob Bell’s description of Jewish discipleship in *Velvet Elvis* (Zondervan, 2005), 129-130.

³ I’m indebted to Fred Craddock for this insight in *Luke* (John Knox Press, 1990), 181

and to the cross. Jesus is going to give away his life for the sake of the world. So it just makes perfect sense that if being a disciple means that you do everything that your master is doing, then disciples of Jesus are also to set aside their own self-interests and personal well-being, their very lives, for the sake of the world.

Now, this does not necessarily mean that Christians all have to be martyred for our devotion to Christ, though it has meant that for many people down through the ages. For most of us what it does mean is that we are to live each day putting the needs of others ahead of our own needs. You put your wife's needs ahead of your needs. You give away more than you can afford to give because somebody else needs what you have more than you need it. You offer kindness to an enemy. You forgive when forgiveness isn't deserved. And in each of these things there is a kind of death, a death of your own will, your own desires, your own pride, your own well-being, our own self-interests. And if we are not willing to die to ourselves in this way then Jesus says we cannot be his disciples.

Finally, our allegiance to Christ is to precede our allegiance to our material possessions. In verse 33 Jesus says, **“So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.”** Does Jesus mean that we have to be willing to give away every single thing in our possession if we are Christians? Clearly he can't mean that literally because he allowed lots of his followers to own property and possessions. But once you follow Jesus you quickly learn that none of the material things in your possession belong to you but rather it all belongs to him. Your stuff, your home, your money, it's all to be used the way he would use it if it were in his possession because, again, it's all his to begin with. If you can't do this you probably do need to give it all away because your stuff is standing in between you and Jesus. If you can't give it away, or at least aren't willing to give it away when asked by Jesus to do so, then you cannot be his disciple. It's not that you won't be very good disciple, a mediocre disciple at best, but that *you won't be a disciple at all*. That's what Jesus says here three times.

Martin Luther summed all this up perfectly in that line from the hymn *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*: “Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also.” To be a disciple of Jesus means to give our ultimate allegiance to him, even above family, even above possessions, even above our life on this earth! To clarify, this does not mean that we have to forsake these things completely, but that they need to take their proper place. Listen carefully here. We don't necessarily have to give up these things but we do need to learn to relate to them in the way Jesus wants us to relate to them. Said another

way, our loyalty to Christ not only takes precedence over all other loyalties, but actually redefines all those other loyalties. We don't let our families dictate how we should treat Jesus but we do let Jesus dictate how we should treat our families. We don't let our material wealth dictate how we should follow Jesus, but as we follow Jesus he shows us how to handle wealth according to his will. Our whole life is in his hands. As Paul put it, **“To live is Christ; to die is gain!”**⁴

Now, if you are paying attention, if you are getting the gist of what Jesus is saying here, the all-or-nothing nature of what he says it means to be a Christian, you're seeing that the cost of discipleship is extraordinarily high. It costs everything! And Jesus is clear here that we should consider that cost before we set out to follow him. He uses two illustrations that everybody in those days would have understood to make this point. Don't begin a major construction project unless you have enough resources to finish the job. Don't go off to war unless you have confidence that you can be victorious over your enemy in battle. If you can't finish or can't win, but set out anyway, you are a fool.

When I officiate at weddings I always spend time beforehand with the couple talking about the vows, which usually sound something like this:

I, Mike take you, Susan, to be my wife; to have and to hold from this day forward; for better, for worse; for richer, for poorer; in sickness and in health; to love, cherish and honor; till death do us part; according to God's holy law; and to this I give you my pledge.

These are serious promises a bride and groom make to one another and to God, and so I think part of my job as their pastor is to make sure they count the cost before tying the knot. The last thing I want is for a couple to get into the marriage and say, “Wow, this is hard. I didn't know this was going to be hard. Better or worse? Some days trying to live with this other person are a lot more worse than better. Richer or poorer? We aren't quite as rich as I thought we would be. Sickness or health? I didn't know I signed up to be a caretaker! Till death do us part? That's turning out to be a lot longer than I thought it'd be. I don't think I can keep those promises.” Don't get me wrong, marriage can be beautiful and wonderful, but it's also hard at times. Only a fool enters into that commitment without counting the cost beforehand. What are you promising?² No different with Christ.

Bruce Larson, the longtime pastor of University Presbyterian Church in Seattle, recognized that for

⁴ Philippians 1:21 (NIV)

years he had made excuses why he had never placed Jesus as the first and only priority and love in his life. When he did pray he would often say, “Lord, I’m just so busy. Help me to simplify my schedule so I can put you first.” Well, one day he had the clear sense that God has saying back to him, “Larson, you haven’t missed a meal in years. You get plenty of sleep most of the time. You always seem to find time for the things that are important to you. I’m not that important to you. I can handle that. Can you handle it?”⁵

I just think Jesus wants us just to be honest with ourselves and with him. Don’t play games. To pretend to be something you’re not, that is one thing Jesus really can’t stand. So he tells us that as we consider being disciples we must count the cost. Do I really know what I’m doing when I profess faith in Christ? Do I realize what that means, what it will cost me? Do I possess the resources to see it through? Because there is only one sort of Christian, the one who says to Jesus, “I will follow you wherever you lead me and let you teach me how to live every part of my life as you would live my life if you were in my shoes.”

“Salt is good;” Jesus continues, **“but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; they throw it away.”** Do you understand what he means by this? Why do you put salt on your food? To enhance the taste, right? To bring out the flavor. Well if the salt on your dinner table suddenly became tasteless, would you still put it on your steak or your corn? No. There would be no point. You’d throw it out.⁶

This is a hard word, truth in love. Jesus is saying here that if you’re just traveling along with him, seeing him as nothing more than a useful accessory in your life, then your Christian faith is worthless. It’s lost its essential quality, or maybe never had it in the first place, which is absolute allegiance to Christ in every aspect of life. This was a real danger for people who hung around with Jesus in those days just as it is a real danger for people who hang around in churches these days.

“Let anyone with ears to hear listen!” That’s how Jesus ends this teaching on discipleship. And this morning if you are somebody who has ears to hear, somebody who is really listening to what Jesus is telling us here, you realize that his calling to follow him as a disciple is costly. It costs everything! And maybe this makes discipleship seem impossible, out of reach for

people like me or you. After all, who could live like this? Isn’t that the question that some of us are asking? How can somebody like me follow Jesus in this way?

What’s interesting to consider is that in Jesus’ day, as I said before, only the best and the brightest were called as disciples to rabbis of that time. That meant that most young men, and certainly all women because they were totally excluded, were left to return home and learn the family business, to become carpenters, or farmers, or fisherman. With this in mind, think for a minute about the sorts of people Jesus first called as disciples. Remember this scene from Matthew 4: **“As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen.”**⁷

Why are Peter and Andrew fishing? Every Jewish boy wanted above all else to be a disciple to a rabbi. That was the dream. So why are these two young Jewish men fishing? Because they were not the best and the brightest! They didn’t make the cut. A rabbi would not call a disciple unless that rabbi believed that disciple could actually become like him. Apparently, no rabbi had thought much of Peter and Andrew, so they were sent back home to learn the family business, to spend their lives catching perch and bass.⁸

So what does that teach us about Jesus’ view of Peter and Andrew? These ordinary men, men others had determined did not have the right stuff, were exactly the sorts of people Jesus called to follow him so closely that they would eventually be covered in the dust of his feet. Could it be that Jesus isn’t looking for the best and the brightest – whatever that means – but simply the willing?

And what did Peter and Andrew do? They followed. Though they had no credentials to speak of, they left everything – their boats and nets, their families, and ultimately their lives – and went after Jesus all the way to the cross and beyond. Their journey, like the journey of all disciples, was not marked by perfection but by progress. It takes a lifetime for enough of Jesus’ dust to cover us so that we begin to resemble him. But imperfect people like Peter and Andrew, like me and you, we can be, by the grace of God, shaped into the likeness of Christ. The rabbi wouldn’t call us if he didn’t believe this were possible. All that is required is a willingness to forsake all else and come.

The early African bishop Augustine once wrote these beautiful words describing the sort of person Jesus is

⁵ Bruce Larson, *The Communicator’s Commentary: Luke* (Word Books, 1983), 222.

⁶ At one point Jesus told his disciples, **“You are the salt of the earth.”** (Matthew 5:13)

⁷ Matthew 4:18

⁸ Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis*, 130-132.

looking to call as a disciple. Though he uses only masculine pronouns here, this certainly includes women as well.

Give me a man in love; he knows what I mean.
Give me one who yearns; give me one who is hungry; give me one far away in this desert, who is thirsty and sighs for the spring of the Eternal Country. Give me that sort of man; he knows what I mean. But if I speak to a cold man, he just doesn't know what I'm talking about... You are surprised that the world is losing its grip? That the world is grown old? Don't hold onto the old man, the world; don't refuse to regain your youth in Christ, who says to you: "The world is passing away, the world is losing its grip, the world is short of breath." Don't fear, for thy youth shall be renewed as an eagle.⁹

Does that describe you? Are you hungry and thirsty? Has the world grown old to you, unsatisfying despite all its brash promises it makes? Do you long for the spring of the Eternal Country, for the life you have always suspected we were actually made for? If so, do not forget that though following Jesus will indeed cost you everything, as you give your life away you will find it in the end. Even if we must forsake earthly family to follow Jesus, in doing so he gives us an eternal family we will never have to forsake. As we give up earthly treasure for the sake of Christ, there is heavenly treasure he promises will take its place. Even were we to give our very lives, in death we will find life beyond what we can now even begin to envision. As Jesus said elsewhere, **"For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."**¹⁰

Amen.

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The Next Step

A resource for Life Groups and/or personal application

1. Read Luke 14:25-35 again. What stands out to you first from this passage?
2. What do you think Jesus means by saying that his disciples must 'hate' their families?

3. Jesus says that anybody unwilling to carry the cross and follow him cannot be his disciple. What do you think it means to carry the cross?
4. Have you thought much about the difference between a person who wants to know what Jesus knows and a person who wants to actually become like Jesus? Which one more accurately describes your relationship with Christ at this time?
5. Have you ever wondered if the cost of following Jesus is too high to make it worth it?
6. Does our primary allegiance to Jesus have a negative or positive effect on our other allegiances in life? How so?
7. In reflecting on Jesus' warning about salt losing his saltiness, writer Fred Craddock imagines, "Under pressures both open and subtle, pressures all of us know, salt does not decide to become pepper; it just gradually loses its savor. The process can be so gradual, in fact, that no one really notices. Well, almost no one." What do you think he means? Do you recognize this danger in your own life?
8. Are you the sort of person Jesus is likely to call as a disciple? Why or why not?

Table to Table Question

A question for kids and adults to answer together

What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus? How do you tell disciples of Jesus from other people?

⁹ Cited by Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship* (NavPress, 2006), 17.

¹⁰ Matthew 16:25 (NRSV)