



The Westminster Pulpit

Sermons Preached at Westminster Presbyterian Church
3900 West End Avenue Nashville, Tennessee 37205-1899

“Are you serious?” **Sermon on Luke 14:25-33**

Donovan A. Drake

September 7, 2025

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

There comes a time in life when you’ve made a life-changing decision! “I’m going to take the job!” “I’m going to make the plunge!” “The pain is only getting worse. I’m going to do the surgery.” A life-changing decision.

Jesus had a few of those, too. One day, he decided to untie his carpenter’s apron and leave behind a career and a life in the suburbs and head down to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. It was a life-changing decision. That’s Luke, Chapter Three. The beginning of his ministry.

Another life-changing decision in Chapter Nine was when Jesus stopped the random ramblings around the hillsides of Galilee, and “set his face towards Jerusalem.” That means he’s going to turn his face to the cross. There, he would rub elbows with the authorities and rub them the wrong way. It’s a life-changing decision.

Our scripture today finds us halfway to Jerusalem, and Jesus has a “great crowd” of followers. And I wonder if it is in the wonder of Jesus to ask that great crowd, “Do any you have any idea what you’re getting yourself into in following me?” He says that to the great crowd. He says it to us.

Luke 14:25-33

²⁵Now 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. ²⁷Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸For 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? ²⁹Otherwise, 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.

Jesus can't be serious! If he's serious, we'd have to change the baptism vows. The family all gathered together in the chancel, "And do you promise to HATE your mother and father, wife, and children, brother and sister, and follow Jesus?" You answer "I do" to that. And good luck swallowing the pimento cheese sandwiches at Grandma's luncheon after the service.

Hating your family and giving up ALL your possessions – you can't be serious! For those of you who think the God of the Old Testament is meaner than the God of the New Testament – today – I'd go with what Guy read from Deuteronomy! That life choice of obeying the Lord's commandments has us living a long and fruitful life.

I'd make the life choice of the Psalm One we sang - "How happy are the saints of God who do not heed the wicked way. ...Their fruit is plentiful and good, their leaves are always growing green!"

Seriously, doesn't that sound better than.... taking up a cross and choosing death.

"Hate your ma, hate your pa, and sell your possessions!"

Jesus has a thing or two to learn about church growth. We need a great crowd! I like the billboard I saw on my way to Charlotte one afternoon. "Come to worship, cushioned seats and cup holders." Now that's gospel!

He has a crowd. A crowd that was fed in the desert. Don't you know that word got out about that? "I'm telling you there wasn't any food, and suddenly there was food." There was a crowd – a crowd to see the deaf hear. The blind see. The lame walk! That's a show!

And the crowd grew and grew, and then Jesus had to say, "Do you have any idea where I am going?"

Hate your ma, hate your pa, take up a cross, sell your possessions. You have to decide to follow Jesus! Remember the old hymn, "I have decided to follow Jesus!" That's what the Baptists sing. We don't decide anything. Presbyterians are chosen.

We baptize babies... "Tylenol babies!" For fear that they might have a little Baptist in them and say something. Because we believe in God's love and God claims us before we can claim God. Like the children of Abraham, we are children of God, "and that is what we are!"

The family of God! What is this?

"Hate your ma, hate your pa, sell your possessions." You have to make a life choice.

Now the word hate surely wakes us up a bit, especially in the South. When I moved to the south, I learned that "hate" was a strong word. Up north, we hate all sorts of things. I hate

green jellybeans, snow in May, when the dog bites, when the bee stings, these are a few of our most hated things. I came down to the south, and was told that I needed to pack that word up, use it only on rare occasions. I didn't know!

So, it might help our southern sensibilities to hear that hate in the ancient Semitic sense isn't so much hate but more a way of expressing detachment. Turning away from. Jesus is saying, "Loyalty to me can create tension."

Just ask the parents who sent their child to Duke. Premed. And then the child goes to the chapel and hears the call of God to enter ministry. And her parents were hot. "What are you thinking? You're intelligent. Gifted! Why do you want to be a pastor?" Just ask the spouse who doesn't understand why the new car has to wait, and we're going to help the soup kitchen buy a new stove. Putting Jesus first can cause some tension.

Jesus says, "You need to know this about me." You need to do the calculation. Is following me worth it? After all, who, when taking on a construction project - building a tower - doesn't calculate the cost? What King going to war doesn't calculate the cost of the war? Who buys a house, a second house, a third house, and doesn't calculate the cost?

Jesus reminds me of my mother here. Grew up in the Depression. Her daddy was from Scotland. Tight as a tick with the money. Everything was a calculation to my mother.

I remember calling my her, all excited that I was going to... "Mom! Beth is the one! I'm going to ask her to marry me." My mother's response: "Do you have any money?" "No." "Well, you may want to think about that..." I remember that as clear as a bell.

I did, and we got married with \$583 in the bank. We grew a garden in our backyard, and ate vegetable soup for two years. I can't eat vegetable soup to this day. But we saved money! Young and in love doesn't calculate!

You don't know what you're going to get into.

Except that you're all in. Jesus calls it the "pearl of a great price." How do you calculate that? When you see the "pearl of a great price," you have to sell everything to get it! It's the most beautiful, remarkable thing you can have in your life. You fall in love, you give your life away. "Here's my heart. I trust you with this." And who knows what will happen next?

I don't know how to begin to calculate about Jesus. When I was 14, whatever I calculated about Jesus back then doesn't even add up today! My thought about Jesus was way different than it is today. I can look back and see how I tried to follow, but failed so many times in my understanding of Jesus. Today, I know a little more of His amazing grace than I did yesterday. I didn't know anything about Jesus when I started to follow Jesus, started in ministry. I didn't know how to make the calculation because I had no idea what was going to happen! Who knows about tomorrow?

Following Jesus has led me to places I didn't know existed.

I recall taking the rather wealthy gentleman to an apartment complex to meet people who were once homeless. I just wanted to show him around the place. No other motive than to show him around, and get him to open his wallet and help us fund this thing! And just by chance, a young boy, a little taller than his kneecap, took him by the hand and pulled him over

to a table, and that relatively wealthy man sat down on a small chair. Knees up to his chin. And the boy showed him a plastic horse and engaged him in conversation. The boy was right there pressing his body into his arm. And I watched that man put his arm around that boy. None of that was in my calculation. None of how that might have changed the man's life was in my calculation. I don't know! You don't know. Now that boy had nothing, nothing at all, only that little toy horse and a need to love on a stranger.

When I entered ministry, I was naive and inexperienced. I didn't know I'd see that!

I didn't know there would be a couple who never came to church, but at stewardship time, he would fill out a pledge card for an amount that would keep them on the rolls. And they would include a long letter complaining about the church. It used to get under my skin. "Who is this guy?"

So, one day I decided to give them a piece of my mind, and I visited them at their home. Imagine that! What I learned was that she was sick. And he was proud. And I learned that I rather liked him. And I was suddenly all in. After she died, he came to Wednesday night fellowship, all by himself. I was amazed at how the church just welcomed him in, gave him hugs. Everyone just doted on him. He said to me, "You know, I was wrong about the church!" And I had to say, "I was wrong, too."

I didn't know in ministry how people would teach me scripture. I know scripture, but they taught me scripture. Katherine, sick with cancer, saying, "This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." She taught me that scripture and taught me that no matter what happens to you, to me, that this is the day the Lord has made. It's a gift. And we have power in that gift. It's part of the calculation that doesn't add up.

I didn't know how a boy named Rees, who died a year ago today, would illuminate John, chapter 9 — who sinned? This man or his parents? He had that on his arm. I didn't know what it was like to have the cards he was dealt. And then to see what he did with it, and how God did amazing things with his life. I didn't know.

I didn't know, when my dad died, then when my mom died, how much a church casserole really costs—all the ingredients of time, love, and saying a prayer. I didn't know how much a bible study helps you see the image of God in others.

Calculate the cost? You can't be serious. You follow Jesus, and he'll take you places. Hard places, joyful places, you'll walk on water for a moment, and then you'll fall. And then there's always the hand that raises you up. You have to include that hand of mercy in your calculation. You'll say you're all in, and then the cock will crow. How much is mercy worth?

I'm just going to follow. Jesus, you're just going to have to deal with me. I choose you. Because choosing a life of having things, choosing a life of constant selfies, choosing a life of artificial intelligence, choosing a life that's full of fear. Choosing that? Over Jesus? You can't be serious!

Copyright©Donovan A. Drake 2025