

SLD09.09.07 23rd Ordinary Rally Day/Commissioning Teachers
Emory Presbyterian Church
Jeremiah 18:1-20a + 19:1-4a, :10-11a
Luke 14:25-33

“Calculate the Cost”

Okay, so, in case you think Jeremiah's the only one on a tear, let's turn now to hear what Jesus has to say to us this morning. I just want to tell you that the way I see it, in today's text Jesus is in a bit of a mood, if you know what I mean. He's at a dinner party with a bunch of Pharisees, you see, and apparently the conversation's gotten a little tense.

Now, it's not that Pharisees are always the bad guys – we need to know better than that. In fact, some of them have just warned Jesus to skip town quick because Herod's after him. Nor does Jesus always disagree with the Pharisees (Mk 12:18), whose power and influence are largely rooted in their disciplined interpretation and observance of Jewish law. It's just that the Pharisees aren't always quite sure what to make of this pesky young rabbinic know-it-all who keeps challenging their view of things. And for Jesus' part, well, it just gets to be a drag after a while to be invited for a social occasion only to discover that all anybody *really* wants is to check him out up close.

So after a tiresome evening of everybody weighing his every word and scrutinizing his every move, Jesus just decides to up and give 'em their money's worth. First he heals one miserable somebody nearby despite it being the Sabbath. Then he fusses at the guests for trying to claim the best seat at the table. Then he lets his host under no uncertain terms that he's invited all the wrong people. Then he launches on some nutty parable about the lame excuses people always give for not showing up, and

how the only ones who really ought to be invited in the first place are the scuzzballs nobody wants to be around...and in so doing, manages somehow systematically to offend every single solitary Pharisee at the table.

And *then*, as if ruffling the feathers of merely the dinner guests in the room doesn't quite satisfy Jesus' apparently overwhelming urge to alienate, he leans out the window to address the crowd (you see, it's late in Jesus' ministry and by this time people are flocking to his teaching, so there are all these people just sort of hanging around. So Jesus leans out the window and says: **Luke 14:25-33**

Or, in summary, "I don't care what you think you know, or what you think of me - here's the ungarbled word, and if you can't handle it, bug off." You can just see his disciples cringing, can't you? I mean, who *raised* this guy?

All right, so I just want to say there are three general roles for Jesus in the gospels: priest, prophet, and king. Now which do you suppose he's playing here?

"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!"

Sound like a king? Not a very charismatic one. A priest? A pastor? I don't think so. These are not the words of a guy on a salary.

"Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."

Sound like any church marketing plan *you've* ever heard of?

"Whoever does not give up all their possessions cannot be my disciple."

Okay, so maybe that sounds a *little* like a pastor during stewardship season.

But really, we all know that today's diatribe really hails from Jesus as prophet, don't we. Matter of fact, Jesus as *annoying* prophet. Say, Jesus as Jeremiah? Jesus

doing his best to break the clay pot in the sight of the people, so we know what we might be getting into? You follow? Well, think twice before you do.

“You follow me and it’s gonna cost you,” says Jesus. “Follow me and most of what you know, and just about everything you are, is liable to get broken;” shattered as a dropped pot, matter of fact. I’m talking about way past any mending *you’ll* be able to come up with. I’m talking about, follow me and you *will* be changed. And it’s liable to be hurt, capisce?”

Of course, when Jesus talks about his disciples hating mothers and fathers and sisters and brothers and whatnot, he’s not really calling for some emotion-filled, heart-rending rejection of those most dear to us; it’s just a Semitic way of expressing detachment.¹ I mean, contrary to the Pharisees’ determination, the man is not nuts. He’s just saying – practically speaking, you follow me and there’s bound to be some competing claims on your time, on your energy, on your life. And when one of those claims butts up against me, well, *I rule*. And you know, not everybody’s gonna be okay with that. Which is too damn bad.

So this is how Jesus is talking to this whole slew of folks who, may I remind you, have voluntarily showed up to hear what he has to say. You might join me in wondering what happened to “We’re so glad you visited today. Won’t you come again?” But then again, remember that Jesus isn’t building a church; he’s is building a kingdom. And in case people want to join him, well, he just wants them to know what we’re getting into.

¹ Preaching Through the Christian Year, Year C, Trinity Press Internat’l, Valley Forge, Pa. 1994, p. 401.

For, like Flannery O’Conner says, “what people don’t realize is how much religion costs. People think faith is a big electric blanket, when of course it’s the cross.”²

Still, I’m thinking maybe Jesus starts noticing how people are shifting around, looking at each other, maybe starting to turn away, ‘cause he starts softening a little, saying, “Okay look. Let’s be reasonable here. Let me just ask you straight – which of you, if you were going to build, say, a multi-purpose facility, wouldn’t sit down first and figure out how much it would cost you?

Okay, now he’s talking to *us*, right? Us Presbyterians? ‘Cause we don’t do *nothing* without first considering it from every *conceivable* angle. None of this first century Semitic impulsiveness for us – uh uh. God gave us a brain and we’re meant to use it to do things decently and in order, right? You and I, we think through things ahead of time and consider the costs, ponder the consequences, plan for the contingencies, and then, and only then, proceed...with whatever assumptions are associated with the worst case scenario. No way *we’re* starting any project we can’t finish!

So, just in case you and I ever *do* get around to building a really cool, LEED-certified, revenue-producing, community-building, multi-purpose shared facility on our church property, you can bet we’ll have it all figured out ahead of time just who’s going to pay for it (besides *us*), and have gathered several detailed estimates for building it plus added between 10 and 50%, depending on an infinite number of variables, *and* interviewed half this country, plus another, for the best possible architect and builder.

² “Flannery O’Conner, *All Saints: Daily Reflections*, Robert Ellsberg, Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, 1999, p. 331.

Because...Presbyterian or not, it's just flat *common sense* to consider the cost of an endeavor before embarking on it. Which is all The Man is saying.

Take a king, for example; a ruler who's fixin' to wage war on another country. Now what king would wage a war without first considering the alternative, Jesus wants to know? What ruler would presume to invade a country without first calculating the resources required to do so? The number of troops you're willing to deploy...and sacrifice.... The quantity and quality of the enemy's armaments (I mean, their REAL armaments)...their fighting style...the time it's likely to take to achieve your goal... or for that matter, **just** what your goal really is? I mean, any king with a lick of sense would calculate all those things *before* a preemptive strike, wouldn't he? asks Jesus. Or if not, he says, maybe it'd just be better to figure out some way to wage peace instead of war.

Bottom line, don't be following Jesus until you've consider the cost - that's all he's saying. It may not be a popular approach to evangelism, but then Jesus isn't running a church; he's running a Kingdom. A Kingdom he's willing to die for. Follow him and you'd better be willing to die for it, too, that's all he's saying, "for the disciples are not exempt from the leader's burden."³

Reckon the crowd around Jesus thinned a little that day?

How 'bout the crowd here at Emory Church? Is your attention thinning. How willing, after all, are you and I to hear and act on these challenging words from Jesus the prophet?

Today is Rally Day, yet another moment in the church year when we're actively, even aggressively, invited to "rally" ourselves to study, learn, teach, and explore our tradition, to join a learning community, to risk attending a class, or leading one, to

³ Ibid. p. 400

worship regularly, to serve on Session, support fellowship, serve others or otherwise follow God's lead in broadening our understanding, deepening our faith, building our community, and sharing it with the world.

Some of us will calculate the cost of that invitation and decide it's not worth it. Others may figure that it is. Whatever *your* position, just keep in mind that, besides the general hassle and demand of being a member of the body of Christ, that body is on its way to the cross. That's all Jesus is saying. He's being gracious, really – just giving us the chance to bail.

To the glory of God. Amen.