

THE PRICE OF LEMONADE

Luke 14:25-33

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The crowd came quicker than we thought. It was one of those days around here when the weather is just right. The timing was perfect for a little extra traffic on our block. My kids and I had put together our version of a lemonade stand. We'd made a project out of it and built a proper stand from scrap wood. We even added a little paint. The kids made a menu: "lemonade, cookies."

They were so excited when the first customer stopped by. After he was served, he asked, "How much is it?" We had prepared everything just right. There were signs, décor, cups, cookies. I had not prepared them for this. Our patron looked at them, they looked at me, I looked back at them, and they looked back at him. The truth is, the price was the last thing on our minds.

What is the price of lemonade? How much would you pay? I suppose that depends on a few factors. Is this dixie cup or solo cup? Fresh squeezed or powder? Cold or room temperature? We had prepared for everything but that.

"What will this cost?"

That is the question that nobody in Jesus' crowd seems to be able to answer. In fact, it sounds like few, if any, have even asked. Jesus is surrounded by enthusiasm. In Luke 14, Jesus turns to speak to a crowd that seems totally unaware that he is on a journey to Jerusalem and to the cross.ⁱ

Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard once said that his day was full of preachers "whereby Jesus hath obtained admirers rather than followers."ⁱⁱ Jesus has garnered the attention of a host of admirers. The problem is that he was never all that interested in admirers. But there is a vast expanse between admiration and discipleship, and Jesus intends to describe how to cross it.

I have people tell me all the time how much they admire what we do here. Plenty of people appreciate what churches do. You and I both know that plenty of people admire good things with no intention of being a part of it. You can respect, even venerate, something and never even come close to participating in it.

Jesus has built a crowd, but it quickly becomes clear that it's not a measure of success. It is a problem to be addressed. David Garland notes, "The crowds need to know that it will not be enough to say that they were there, heard his teaching, saw his miracles, and ate with him."ⁱⁱⁱ Jesus dispels of the idea that all discipleship involves is just showing up.

His crowd has not yet asked, “What will this cost?” They seem oblivious of the nature of this crowd. What is this journey that they have joined?

Fred Craddock envisions them asking the same questions: “Is it a march? Very likely some think so, investing a good deal of emotion in imagining the projected clash: Galilee versus Jerusalem, peasants versus power, laity versus clergy, Jews versus Romans, Jesus versus the establishment. Is it a parade? Obviously, this crowd thinks so, oblivious to any conflict, any price to pay, any cross to bear. The crowds swell; everybody loves a parade.”^{iv}

Among the parades that come through our city is the annual cattle drive. You can watch 60 longhorns make their way through downtown Amarillo on a Saturday morning. We were there a year or two ago, right where the whole thing starts, over on Polk Street.

The longhorns were a sight, but like any parade, the kids are taken by the candy. You do your best to hold them back for safety. Otherwise, they would join the parade line just to grab that shattered tootsie pop on the street. After a few minutes, the cattle and horses had all passed, and the street remained littered with unclaimed candy. My oldest son was the first to venture into the very middle of the street. A big gap in the festivities had opened like a gulf before us, and there was no stopping the Blow Pop pursuit.

We all knew about the 60 longhorns, but I had not read about the periodic staged “Old West” shootouts. With one hand holding his shirt tail full of candy, one hand scavenging the pavement, and his eyes fixed on the next score, suddenly we heard three quick “bangs.” He lept out of his skin, nearly spilling the spoils, with his eyes wide open. He found himself between two cowboys with double revolvers drawn, smoke coming from each one. Their cap-guns had been fired in a display of Old West history. In a moment he had gone from a parade-goer to an alarming situation. He went from candy land to caught red-handed.

You can end up in a parade and not realize how you got there. The people around Jesus have joined and suddenly find out they may be getting more than they bargained for.

Jesus turns to all those hasty volunteers and clarifies. He tells them: Think about what you are doing. You need to decide if you are willing to stay with me all the way. Jesus’ disciples are those who change every priority in their lives and conform to his way of the cross, and so, he lets them know what it will cost them.

Three times in our passage Jesus uses the same basic refrain: “Whoever does not... cannot be my disciple.”

“Whoever does not... hate his own life” (14:26)

At first glance, especially in English, this is one of the more perplexing sayings of Jesus. Does the one who teaches “love your enemies” really insist that I hate my family? That’s a reasonable question. It helps comprehend the harshness to know that, in Semitic language, what we translate as “hate” is not what you might imagine. You and I know that the expression “I hate

you” carries the weight of emotion and a sense of disgust. In this case, what’s said is more like “to turn away from” something, often concerned more with comparison or priority. It’s about detachment.

As an illustration, you’ll find it in the Old Testament. God sees that Rachel is loved and Leah is hated (Gen. 29:31). The suggestion is not that one is despised, but that one is, by comparison, loved more. To support that interpretation further, just go to Matthew and you’ll find a parallel saying “anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.”

Jesus also says, “even your own life.” He’s saying, “Don’t make your life the end and me the means. Your life is the means and I am the end.” He’s saying, I want you to love me. Look at all these human loves. I want and I offer a love that makes them pale by comparison. The stars are out all day, but the sun outshines them all.^v

See, even if we can reign in the harshness of the terms, the significance is no less. Love of Christ is to take precedence over all other loves. In a world where our loyalties run in many directions, Christ’s claim is to take priority over all. This will mean some detaching and turning away.

“Whoever does not... carry his own cross” (14:27)

A second condition is given. Carrying your cross has become its own idiom. After Jesus’ own cross, it certainly grew in meaning. Of course, he speaks to a crowd that is not yet aware of Jesus crucified. What would this challenge have meant to them?

It’s hard to overemphasize just how much shame was connected to crucifixion. It took lives, but it wasn’t really the way to kill someone. It was the way to hoist them up before any would-be followers and make sure everyone knew exactly who was in charge. These terms have been watered down by overuse, I would guess. We talk about a chronic illness, or physical pain, or difficult people, as “just our cross to bear.”

Someone who takes up his or her cross is someone who is committed to the end. No one ever began carrying a cross, only to give up on the way there and be set free. The one burdened with a cross is on an irreversible course. There are no distractions, no worries about tomorrow, and no business deals to make. There is only one end possible -- going all the way.

“Whoever does not... give up everything” (14:33)

A third condition emerges. Whoever does not give up or, literally, “say farewell to” everything you have “cannot be my disciple.” Just like Jesus is speaking to each and every person (“anyone”), he speaks here of each and every thing (“everything”).

The demand is total. It would crush the spirit of anybody in the parade that day who thought the ride sounded fun. Jesus has no interest in admirers who enjoy good teaching while leaving their fundamental values, attachments, and manner of life unchanged.

Paul understands this farewell when he writes in Philippians 3: *“More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him.”*

Is this just a hard teaching? Just bad news? Or could it be good news?

Counting the Cost

The passage includes two parables of warning in the middle:

“Who among you,” Jesus says, “when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?” What kind of tower Jesus pictures isn’t clear. Likely, it was something common to rural life, a farm building made for protection. Possibly, it was something more substantial. Some suggest that Jesus points to something historical (Herod’s Aqueduct). The assumption is that people are usually careful not to embark on some project without making reasonably sure of their ability to carry it through to a successful end.

The second parable is about a king. “Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand?” Both parables portray that there is a need, before taking on a project like this, to “first sit down.” You have to deliberate. Take this seriously. Tabulate the cost. Take stock before you try to rise up and meet this challenge.

So there it is. The price of belonging to Jesus has been made clear. The rich and the poor, the royalty and the peasants, all have the same essential decision to make: *Does it cost more than I am able or willing to pay?*

On the first point (whether you’re *able*), the answer is simple: Whoever. Anyone. I think Jesus speaks those words at the crowd and means them. He sees hearts and minds capable of giving everything. Not unlike this very room, Jesus sees people who long for something that matters and ache deep down to give everything to something bigger than themselves.

Simon, James, and John (5:11) and Levi (5:28) are reported to have left everything to follow him. Twice, once to his disciples (12:33) and once to a rich man (18:22), Jesus advises people to sell their possessions and distribute proceeds to the poor. Peter informs him that they have left their own things and followed him (18:28), and the pattern of sacrificial giving continues in the Christian community after the resurrection (Acts 2:45; 4:34).

The beauty of “everything” is that anyone can provide it. If we measured by the world’s standard, some among us would have more to give and some less to offer. But *anyone can give everything*. You don’t have to worry about whether or not it will be enough. In fact, it isn’t. It will never be. The irony of Jesus’ call to consider the cost is that once we’ve taken stock, we’ll find ourselves inadequate. He alone makes us “able.” Whoever gives everything. Anyone.

The question remaining in the hands of the disciple who rightly hears the words of Jesus is not “Am I able?,” but “Am I willing?”

Here’s the interesting thing: I think you are. I think a gathering like this is fully aware that things that matter come at a price. Sure, there are always a few who are looking for the least possible level of commitment, satisfied taking the bottom shelf product. Maybe that’s even most people, but it’s not everybody.

There are some people (maybe some of those people are you) for whom life is so confusing, so challenging, the questions so unanswerable, that you know in your heart of hearts that if there is anything that can speak to you, anything that can make a difference in your life, it will not come simply. It won’t be 3 easy steps offered for free or a simple slogan that fits on a sticker. It will not come cheap.^{vi}

Walking in the way of Jesus will demand something of you. You will have to give something. You will have to change in order to get better. I think people are dying for something so powerful, so transforming, so life-giving, so real.

The Price of Lemonade

I did discover the price of lemonade. Once you go into the business, you’ve also enlisted to be a customer of others. If you’re going to set up shop and solicit the neighborhood, you better be ready to support local business. So when the boys down the street had their table out at the curb and the pitcher full of lemonade, we made sure to take our turn.

It’s almost as fun for the kids to go shop as it is for them sell. We parked at home and started a short walk around the corner to buy a few cups of lemonade. As we set out, I grabbed a few extra dollars and slid them in my wallet next to the bigger bills. When it came time to pay, I listened for instructions, glad to give them whatever they asked. They said, “Oh, just whatever you want to pay.” I paused, realizing they had wisely put the choice back on me.

Then they added, “Did we tell what we’re saving for?”

“No,” I said. “What’s the plan?”

“We want a get ninja warrior course,” they said in unison.

First, it caught me by surprise that they had a plan at all. I admired that. To add to it, I happen to think that anything that gets a few more kids playing outside is a win for everyone. Who doesn’t love a climbing course in the backyard? I was excited with them and for them. What a great idea!

I opened my wallet, and the spare change I’d brought along no longer felt like enough. So I reached in and pulled out everything I had, and I slid it into their collection jar. I’m not saying I carry the most, but it was everything that I had. The price of lemonade was whatever anyone was willing to give.

So it is with the kingdom of God. The truth is that if you knew what Jesus is building, if you knew what God was up to with the things He requires, you would gladly give everything that you have. The master-builder is building something new that the world desperately needs. The King comes to announce that He's won the war and invites you to enjoy the victory. Jesus believes that you're *able*. The only question that remains is, "Are you *willing*?"

I'm convinced that if you "first sit down" and evaluate, if you can see what he's making here in our midst, if you really see what Jesus is working toward, you will gladly give everything that you have.

ⁱ Fred Craddock, *Luke* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1990), 181.

ⁱⁱ Quoted in William Willimon, "The Cost of Discipleship," Duke University Chapel (7 Sept 1986) 2.

ⁱⁱⁱ David Garland, *Luke: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 600.

^{iv} Craddock, 181.

^v Timothy J. Keller, "How to Hate Your Parents," *Gospel In Life* (4 June 2000).

^{vi} Willimon, 3.