

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

A COSTLY COUNTING

Luke 14:25-33

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Analysis by Eric W. Evers

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.

Diagnosis: While we’re stuck on counting

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Offended*

Just as the crowds really build, Jesus speaks these words_that

following him results in family division. While Luke doesn't document a large falling-away, it really does seem as if Jesus is trying to thin out the "large crowds" who are "traveling with" (but, interestingly, not "following") him. Does Jesus want us to hate our families? Do we have to give up all of our possessions? Who does he think he is? How can he expect us to do that? What about family values? What about health and prosperity and blessing? It would come as little surprise if we were offended by these demands.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : Attached

But the offense isn't really because of Jesus. It's because of us. We are the ones who deem Christ's words unreasonable. And that is because we are attached. Our possessions are wrapped around us like chains. And our families? We want them bonded to us, yes, but on our terms. The corner of our heart where this happens may be dark and hidden, but somewhere inside, we see child, spouse, sibling or parent as a means to our own happiness more than an "end" (not for a created good in and of themselves). Rather than seeing our relationships as gifts, we use them as tools for our own benefit. And why would we want to give that up?

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : Rejected

Such selfishness incurs an eternal price, however. It weighs us down enough to keep us from following Jesus, and more, it even disqualifies us to be followers. We can't let go of these attachments, because we won't; no matter what we may think, we just don't want to. But Jesus is plain: if we count our attachments more valuable than him, we cannot be his. He "turns" (v. 25), facing against us, and counts us out.

PROGNOSIS: Christ pays the cost!

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : Redeemed

It cannot be said forcefully enough, however: Jesus has done

what we cannot do. We cannot, we will not carry our own crosses. And so Jesus carries the Cross, the burden and penalty of our counting worldly things more valuable than our Lord. We cannot come to Jesus on his terms. But because of the Resurrection, Jesus comes now to us, reversing the direction. He pursues us in the present moment with grace and forgiveness. We who deserve rejection, we who are rejected in and of ourselves, are now claimed in mercy by the Savior. Jesus counted the cost to claim his rebellious people, found it worthwhile, and in obedience to his Father, he paid it.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : Released

And while this approach, this unconditional claiming, is full of blessing and love, it is not easy. It involves struggle. We cannot pick up our cross, so in redeeming us, Jesus marks us with the cross. He comes to us and puts the struggle onto us. Embraced by God's mercy, we now live a cruciform life, continually turning away from idols and turning to Christ as Lord. This suffering is painful, because the Cross of Christ puts to death the sinful attachments we have to others and to possessions. We must unlearn ways of relating to or, more honestly, of using others. But it is joyful, too. For on this cruciform path, we walk in freedom. We are cut loose to enjoy our relationships and use our possessions as gifts from God, no longer selfishly, but in love and service.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : Reconnected

It does indeed sound harsh and offensive, this talk of hating even family for Jesus' sake. But now, claimed by Jesus and released from our bondage, we can see a new truth: "We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ a Christian comes to others only through Jesus Christ without Christ we also would not know our brother, nor could we come to him. The way is blocked by our own ego" (Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, pp. 21-23). Apart from Christ, our relationships exist only under the

distortion of sin. Once Jesus cuts those twisted bonds, however, the connections are recreated and relationships reforged in him. It is no longer “ego” or self-service that holds us together. Instead, it is Jesus himself who binds us as one. “Now Christians can live with one another in peace; they can love and serve one another by way of Jesus Christ To eternity he remains the one Mediator” (Bonhoeffer, pp. 23-24). We do lose much in being made disciples of Jesus; but as we follow him he redeems and hallows it.