



St. Paul Lutheran Church

“Your Refuge from the Storm”

# Life Group

March 17, 2024

Luke 14:25-33

## Community

### TODAY'S THEME

Before you start something, you need to count the cost of completing the project. In this vineyard, we are called to “steward” God’s gifts as part of living out true discipleship.

### WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO KNOW?

We want our small group to understand that God continues to call us off the map of culture and into the adventure of our rabbi, Jesus. If we’re going to cheerfully join him and partake of the dangers, difficulties and fatigues, we have to be willing to follow him closely. We have to go where he goes, do what he does, think what he thinks, and be his disciples. The only way we can do that is to walk so close to him that even the dust of his sandals gets kicked up all over us. Disciples, covered in the dust of our rabbi. That is counting the cost of discipleship.

### WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO DO?

This week, we want our small groups to count the cost in some way. There are many ways to walk closely as a disciple of Jesus. Pray for one another, sacrifice for someone else, continue to let God speak by reading scripture at home, spend time in prayer, listen to God’s voice. What if we could love our stuff less, and God’s stuff more?

### INTRODUCTION

“The Lewis and Clark Expedition (1804–1806) was the first overland expedition undertaken by the United States to the Pacific coast and back. The expedition team was headed by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark and assisted by Sacajawea and Toussaint Charbonneau. The expedition’s goal was to gain an accurate sense of the resources being exchanged in the Louisiana Purchase. The expedition laid much of the groundwork for the westward expansion of the United States.” (– *Wikipedia*)

One of the most amazing moments in this saga is when Meriwether Lewis invites William Clark to go along on the journey. This would be a courageous adventure. Leaving St. Louis, they would launch into uncharted territory; they would literally step off the map. They would count the cost of leaving family, friends and the familiar behind. They would press on into an adventure that would change their lives, and change the lives of many, many others. That was the invitation Meriwether Lewis offered to William Clark. And here is Clark’s amazing response:

“I will cheerfully join you and partake of the dangers, difficulties and fatigues ... and I anticipate the honors and rewards of such an enterprise ... with many difficulties. But, my friend, I do assure you that no man lives with whom I would prefer to undertake such a trip ... as yourself.” (*From Undaunted Courage by Stephen Ambrose.*)

## ICEBREAKER

Talk about what it must have felt like to be packed up and ready to head west. How do you think Lewis and Clark prepared for this journey? What kind of responsibility did they feel? What can we learn about following from these people? Have you ever done anything that was “off the map,” in uncharted territory?

## PRAY TOGETHER

Father God, you have called us to steward your creation and to faithfully follow you into the dangers and difficulties of life. Guide us and lead us. Reconcile us and renew us for your purposes. Work in us and work through us. We want to give ourselves passionately to everything that matters to you, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

## Content

Imagine Jesus leading a newcomer orientation class for all new disciples. Imagine being in that class yourself. What would you expect to hear? In some ways, that’s exactly what Jesus is putting forth in this section of Luke’s Gospel. Just what does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus?

(*Read Luke 14:25-33.*) Jesus is travelling toward Jerusalem, and has gathered an entourage of followers – great multitudes of people – along with his chosen disciples. Along that journey, Jesus stops and addresses the crowd with a most direct and startling description of their following. To be a disciple of Jesus, one must hate everything, count the cost as if building a tower and going to war, and even renounce all their possessions.

Let’s unpack this. Jesus is speaking to someone who actually desires to attach him or herself to Jesus, just as a student would attach him or herself to a teacher or rabbi. For some people, this is the case, and Jesus is speaking to their dreams.

Context is important here. We must recognize that Jesus is talking to those who have expressed a desire to follow closely, not to the nebulous crowds that also followed Jesus. Jesus is speaking here in a very direct way to those who have made a commitment. The word “hate” usually gets watered down, or softened a bit, when discussed in Bible studies or sermons. But the Greek word is plain and forceful. Interestingly, it is the same “hate” that God exercised in Psalm 5:5, 45:7 and Hebrews 1:9. But even though we may be surprised by such a forceful word, we are probably even more shocked at the objects of that hate: our nearest and dearest family, and even ourselves!

But there’s good news in Jesus’ message. Even with all this hate, love can remain, through God. Both exist, and are compatible – through God alone.

Counting the cost involves not letting anything stand in the way of following Jesus. Think of a father who would hinder his son from fully pursuing his own discipleship, even though Dad claims to be a disciple himself. This kind of hinderance can’t stand in the way, even if the natural love for one’s father remains. This is a difficult thing to understand in our culture today. We don’t understand the relationship between master and disciple. The disciples were to bind themselves to their master, learn from them, even to the point of becoming like them. A total transformation is required, and Jesus is speaking to people who have begun that process. His encouragement is for them to complete the transformation, and let nothing stand in the way; not family or self.

## DISCUSSION

Does the use of the word “hate” trouble you? In what way? What kind of transformation is Jesus talking about here? What stands in your way when you try to follow Jesus?

Coming after Jesus, following in his ways, is the action of being a disciple. But in following him, others are left behind. We must take on what Jesus will take on: the cross. Think of it this way. What if we were to take the cross away? That would condemn the world and seal its fate. Jesus is about the Father's work, fulfilling God's plan of salvation for all time. How amazing it is that Jesus invites others into this wondrous work! The foolishness of the cross is, in part, the foolishness of a suffering salvation. It seems nonsensical at one level, and many would naturally not choose this way of life. Yet Jesus calls us to enter into this life.

## DISCUSSION

Doesn't this require great faith? What seems nonsensical to you about discipleship? What kind of trust does following Jesus require? Does it call us to trust that God knows what God is doing? Does it call us to a transformation from what we are into what we can become? Isn't that what discipleship is all about: becoming something other than ourselves? How might the Holy Spirit be active in making all of this work together?

## GOING DEEPER

Jesus gives us an illustration to make sure we understand what he's saying. Discipleship is no small thing; it's building a life around and in Jesus. Being a Christian is like building a great tower. Consider the costs before you build, lest others laugh and make fun of you! It seems pretty straightforward. But notice that Jesus doesn't say *not* to build it. We must build a tower; we must build a life in Jesus! How? On our own, we would not have the ability or the resources to build a life of discipleship. We need help. Grace alone furnishes all that discipleship needs.

## DISCUSSION

What do you think it costs to build a life around and in Jesus? How does grace furnish all that we need for this enterprise?

## Application

This week, do something together as that takes you off the map and into uncharted territory. Is there something you've always wanted to do, but didn't dare? Is there some connection you've always wanted to make, but haven't been successful? Brainstorm ideas together as a group. Examples could be: serve together at a mission site, provide meals for someone for a week, write letters or emails of encouragement to those who might need it, etc. Commit to one activity as a group during the coming week.

## PRAY TOGETHER

Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (*From "Evening Vespers" in the Lutheran Book of Worship*).

## ADDITIONAL CONVERSATION AND REFLECTION

### *The Power of Gratitude*

#### LUKE 17:11-19

A healthy prayer life is built on a foundation of gratitude. It's not that petitioning God for our needs isn't right or important, but developing a heart of gratitude, regularly expressed in prayer, has the power to shape our soul and the way we see the world. The lepers in Luke 17 were healed as a gift of grace, but only one found the deeper blessing of allowing that gift to deepen his relationship with the Gift-Giver. The more we give thanks, the more we will come to know the heart of God and see the goodness of God all around us. For what can you give thanks today?

**Luke 14:25-33 NLT** A large crowd was following Jesus. He turned around and said to them, (26) "If you want to be my disciple, you must, by comparison, hate everyone else—your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple. (27) And if you do not carry your own cross and follow me, you cannot be my disciple. (28) "But don't begin until you count the cost. For who would begin construction of a building without first calculating the cost to see if there is enough money to finish it? (29) Otherwise, you might complete only the foundation before running out of money, and then everyone would laugh at you. (30) They would say, 'There's the person who started that building and couldn't afford to finish it!' (31) "Or what king would go to war against another king without first sitting down with his counselors to discuss whether his army of 10,000 could defeat the 20,000 soldiers marching against him? (32) And if he can't, he will send a delegation to discuss terms of peace while the enemy is still far away. (33) So you cannot become my disciple without giving up everything you own.