

Luke 14.25-34

Counting the Cost

Amington (Online)

Sunday 4 October 2020

Build, build, build (10)

Building

So far over the summer we've been thinking about *building*.

- We've seen how really it's *Jesus* who builds his church – our part is to join in.
- We've thought about how we need to inspect our lives to work out where we need a repair job.
- We've thought about making sure Jesus is at the centre when we rebuild.
- We've seen how we need to build with the Word and the Spirit together.
- And last week we thought about the way the same God, the same Spirit, works differently in all of us.

If we compare all this to building a house, we've found the plot, we've drawn up the plans, we've got permission, we've found a builder, we're ready to go.

But what does it cost?

What does it *cost* to follow Jesus?

Crowds

At the start of our reading Luke tells us Jesus was hugely popular. **Large crowds were travelling with him** (25) – crowds that grew and grew until he reached Jerusalem for the last time.

The thing is, though, it's easy to listen, but hard to do. It's easy to hear Jesus' words, but hard to change our lives as a result.

We know, don't we, that a large part of commitment is effort. If I buy my wife some flowers or some chocolates, that's lovely. But if I only ever buy her service station flowers on my way home from work because it's convenient... the gift is cheapened because of my lack of effort.

It's like that with following Jesus. The crowds – literally – followed Jesus. But were they disciples? No. Why? Because the cost was too great.

Love or Hate?

Jesus said:

‘If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters – yes, even their own life – such a person cannot be my disciple.’

Luke 14.26 (NIV)

Now, I don’t want to let us off the hook too easily, but Jesus is exaggerating here. Of course he isn’t commanding us to *hate* other people, still less our own families.

No – what he means is that our love for him must be so much greater than our love for others – even our own family – that it seems in comparison like hatred.

My favourite vegetable is the humble carrot. I particularly like them roasted.

My favourite meal is probably pizza. I say ‘probably’... of course it’s pizza.

If I’m hungry and I have the choice between eating carrots and eating a pizza – which am I going to choose? Pizza. Every time.

It's as if I hate carrots because I will always choose pizza over carrots.

Except I don't, I love carrots – I just love pizza *so much more*.

That's a silly example – but friends, the truth is, that is how we must love Jesus if we want to be his disciples.

Cross

I'm sure most of you will have heard, and maybe even used, the little phrase, 'We all have our cross to bear.' When we say that we're talking about our everyday struggles: they're different for each of us, but we all have them.

That is almost the opposite of what Jesus means here.

The crowds listening to Jesus would not have made our mistake. When *they* saw a person carrying their cross it meant that person's life was about to end; they were about to be executed on the very cross they were carrying.

So to be ready to 'carry our cross' doesn't mean to put up with our daily troubles. No. It means being ready to give up *everything* for Jesus. Friends. Family. Money. Home. Security. Everything.

In some countries that is the danger Christians actually face, daily. Here persecution takes a more subtle and less life-threatening form, but it is no more real. It's the undermining of faith, keeping our mouth shut because we're embarrassed to admit we go to church, compromising Jesus' teachings to fit in with those around us, watering down what it means to be a Christian so it's easy for anyone to join in.

That's not what Jesus did. He was totally uncompromising.

'In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.'

Luke 14.33 (NIV)

Counting

It may feel like Jesus is being a prima donna, demanding far more than he has a right to. I mean it's pretty bold. If I demanded you hand over your house keys and bank details I suspect you'd say no.

But Jesus is no tinpot despot – he is the Lord of Life. He alone is the way to the Father. If he is the only way, how can it be wrong for him to tell us to abandon all other ways and follow him? If his is the only safe way, is it not love to tell us to follow only him?

Friends, this is a hard teaching. It's hard because we don't want to hear it. There's part of us that doesn't *want* to put Jesus first: that is called sin. In this life it will always be a struggle, a fight.

But it is one we will win, because he already has.

And that's why this is called the gospel – the *good news*. And it doesn't depend on us. It depends on him. Jesus has already given up everything he had – twice! First he left his Father's side, he laid aside his majesty and glory and power to live on earth among us, as one of us; then he love us more than his own family, then he carried *his* cross, then he gave up even the life he had left. For you. So you can live.

He did that for you – this is how he calls us to respond.

Will you hear what Jesus says?

How will you respond to such love?

Let us pray.

Father, help us learn day by day to put Jesus first, and to love him more than anything and anyone else. Help us respond to his call, following him: wholeheartedly, unreservedly, and together. Amen.