

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST: August 29 – September 4, 2016

Lectionary Readings: Deuteronomy 30:15–20, Psalm 1, Philemon 1:1–21, Luke 14:25–33

Prayer of the Day: *Direct us, O Lord God, in all our doings with your continual help, that in all our works, begun, continued, and ended in you, we may glorify your holy name; and finally, by your mercy, bring us to everlasting life, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.*

This week's references come from the following sources. The appropriate resource will be referenced at the end of an entry by using the letters preceding each resource listed here.

- BPS: Brian P. Stoffregen's commentary notes (Pr, Faith Luth, Yuma AZ) Crossmarks.com/brian
- DL: David Lose, Luther Seminary, *In the Meantime*, www.davidlose.net
- DT: David L. Tiede, *Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament: Luke*
- JS: John Shea, *The Relentless Widow (Luke)*
- L: Lectionary.com
- LSB: *Lutheran Study Bible*
- NISB: *New Interpreter's Study Bible*
- SB: *Serendipity Bible for Groups* (NIV version)
- SPMc: Stephen P. McCutchan, *Water from the Rock, Lectionary Devotional for Cycle C*
- WP: WorkingPreacher.org (Luther Seminary)
 - Jeannine K. Brown (2010), Prof of NT, Bethel Seminary, St. Paul, MN
 - David Lose (2010), Luther Seminary
 - Emerson Powery (2013), Prof. of Biblical Studies, Messiah College, PA

Background information on this text:

- "Although Luke separates this section from the previous material by a change of scene, important connections remain. In particular, the parable of the great feast (14:15-24) had raised the possibility that one's possessions and family network might keep one from joining the feast. Both are not listed as impediments to authentic discipleship. Radical allegiance is necessary." (NISB, 1883)
- "THE CONTEXT: Jesus healed a man with dropsy, leading to a Sabbath controversy (14:1-6). He responded to people seeking good seats by advising them to seek the lowest seat and to invite the least desirable guests (14:7-14). When a dinner guest said, 'Blessed is the one who will eat bread in the kingdom of God,' Jesus responded with the parable of the great dinner, suggesting that the chosen people had declined the invitation because of other priorities and that Gentiles would take their place (14:15-24). This week's Gospel lesson follows naturally from that parable, in which the chosen people were not willing to give the master the priority that he deserved.

VERSES 25-33: COSTLY DISCIPLESHIP: Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem and a cross, but the crowd thinks that he is on his way to Jerusalem and a crown. They consider Jesus a "winner," and follow him so that they too might win. Jesus teaches them that discipleship carries a high price tag. Those who aspire to follow him need to count the cost before signing on the dotted line." (L)

- "*Counting the Cost* (14:25-35): Luke's transition to this section of the discourse offers an indirect reminder of the journey, since these great crowds are 'going along with him' (Gr: *syneporeuonto*). Still, the substance of the discourse which began with the healing of the man with dropsy in 14:1 continues to be 'election' or the protocol of the kingdom with regard to those who have excluded themselves as well as those who have now been invited...the structure also serves to undergird the flow of Luke's narrative, particularly as the repetitions in vv. 26-33 are tied into the conclusion in vv. 34-35 ... All three of the conditions which are stated in the three cases are radical, uncompromising, and fearsome. None of them should be

reduced in their claim, since the whole point of this entire section is to alert those in the crowds (v. 25) who are able to hear (v. 35b) to the extremely high costs which discipleship may entail. Yet these are prophetic warnings and disclosures of the magnitude of the claim of the kingdom...

Those who do become Jesus' disciples should know that the securities of family bonds, personal dignity and life, and possessions will be at risk. The costs of loyalty to this Messiah and his reign will be high." (DT, 269-270)

- "For Luke's audience, Jesus' message here is not new; rather, in a summarizing, staccato format he presents teaching that is reminiscent of earlier material in, e.g., 8:4-21; 9:23-27, 57-62; 12:13-59." (JG, 564)

Day 1

Luke 14:25-33

²⁵Now 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. ²⁷Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸For 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? ²⁹Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, ³⁰saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' ³¹Or 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? ³²If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. ³³So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

Read through the entire Gospel lesson:

- We invite you to continue journaling as a part of your devotional/meditative time.
- Jot down any words or phrases that stand out to you. Make a note of any repeated words or phrases and contemplate the reason for the repetition.
- What do you think God might be saying in this story? Record this in your journal.

Day 2

Luke 14:25-27

²⁵Now 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. ²⁷Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

Background:

- 14:25 "This verse signals a transition. Jesus has been at a dinner in the home of a Pharisee, and his remarks were addressed to the small group gathered for that occasion. Now he is addressing **large crowds**. His message to them is the same as to the earlier dinner group. God demands first place in our lives, and that kind of discipleship is costly." (L)
 - "Luke observes that Jesus is joined on the journey by 'large crowds.' Often in the Lukan account, crowds are presented as pools of neutral persons from whom Jesus might draw disciples, and this is clearly the case here." (JG, 564)

- 14:26-27 “Importantly, both statements concerning the conditions of discipleship are addressed to ‘whoever,’ a reminder that the invitation is an open one.” (JG, 566)
- 14:26 “This sounds anti-family, but it is Semitic hyperbole or exaggeration for effect. Jesus is not calling us to hate father and mother, but is instead calling us to a commitment above all other commitments, including commitment to family. What Jesus says here is in keeping with what he said earlier (see 9:57, 60, 62).” (L)
 - ‘**hate**’ is a Semitic expression meaning ‘to turn away from, to detach oneself from,’ rather than our animosity-laden understanding ... Note that Matthew 10:37 interprets Jesus’ saying: ‘Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.’” (BPS)
 - “The language of ‘hatred’ has surfaced elsewhere in the wider narrative. Jesus points out that many will **hate** his followers because of their association with him (cf. 6:22, 27; 21:17), but they should return the hate with love (cf. 6:27). More likely, Jesus’ hyperbolic language in our passage under discussion -- to hate one’s own family -- is simply to stress the seriousness of taking the journey with him to Jerusalem.” (Powery, WP)
 - “...in this context, ‘**hate**’ is not primarily an affective quality but a disavowal of primary allegiance to one’s kin.” (JG, 565)
 - “Some family systems theory thinking may be appropriate to this section. One’s identity can be so wrapped up in pleasing (or rebelling against) the family that the person has no real self-identity. With such a person, his or her identity is determined by one’s family (or friends or even one’s enemies). It could be that Jesus doesn’t want disciples who are people who just go along with the crowd, but Jesus seeks disciples who are committed individuals -- those who are aware of the costs of following him -- and choose to follow anyway.

However, in the first century, Mediterranean world, one was always identified by one’s family. A father could convert to Christianity and the whole household would be considered Christian ... Perhaps in other words, when does Christianity need to move from ‘our faith to ‘my’ faith?” (BPS)
 - “Luke’s version escalates the traditional demand for loyalty to the kingdom with the phrase **yes, and even his own life** ... the disciple of Jesus is one who follows in the way of the teacher, even as he goes to Jerusalem to die by crucifixion. Life, salvation, and security are not to be found in self-preservation, but in obedience to the way of the Lord, which Jesus himself pursued.” (DT, 270)
- 14:26 “Jesus does not offer the crowds any fantasies of an easy life. He does not play on their needs or appeal to their prejudices. Instead of mollifying them in any way, he turns and confronts them. If they have come to him, then, make no mistake about it, *they have come to him*. If previously they had found identity and refuge by clinging to their family of origin or family of choice, they must forsake that identity and refuge. If they had loved life itself and let this absolute value guide their every decision and action, they must even forsake that allegiance. Jesus is now their center, and there is no room for competing loyalties.” (JS,252)
- 14:26 “This saying fits thematically with Luke 12:51-53, where Jesus warns of families being divided over his message. Because Jesus in his person and message requires those who would follow him to answer the ultimate allegiance question, it is not surprising that he may inherently bring family strife.

The language of this particular saying, however, raises concern for many. Does Jesus really call us to hate our biological families and our very lives? Two observations are helpful in this regard. First, Jesus is using hyperbolic language here as he does frequently in his teachings (e.g., Matthew 18:8-9). This becomes clear when we compare this saying in Luke with its parallel in Matthew (10:37): ‘Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.’

A second helpful observation: the use of "hate" in Luke might reflect an idiom that comes from Hebrew ... Jesus is not calling his followers to hate their families in terms of emotional response; instead, he calls for undivided loyalty to himself above family loyalties." (Brown, WP)

- "Implicit in 9:23, now explicit, is the correlation between setting aside one's family allegiances and reforming the basis of one's self-identity ... As in 9:23, so here Jesus is calling for the reconstruction of one's identity, not along ancestral lines or on the basis of one's social status, but within the new community oriented toward God's purpose and characterized by faithfulness to the message of Jesus." (JG, 565)

- **"NOT ABLE TO BE MY DISCIPLE: Verses 26, 27, 33**

... three times the phrase: 'not able to be my disciple' is stated in these verses. The phrase is exactly the same in all three verses in Greek, but not translated that way in NRSV.

The word for 'able' (*dynamai*) with the negative generally carries with it the meaning of 'not being able' to do something. That is, it refers to something that is impossible for one to do; e.g., Zechariah is **unable** to speak (Lu 1:20 & 22). He may want to speak, but he can't.

However, Luke also uses this phrase to refer to something the person is able to do but chooses not to do: ... it was possible for them to do the task, but they just didn't want to do it.

How should the phrase be understood in our verses? On one hand, with the invited guest being able to come, but choosing not to just a few verses before our text (14:20), *ou dynamai* in our verses could refer to something that is within the abilities of the crowd, but they can choose to do it or not. That is, it is within their abilities to hate their family members and carry their crosses and to give up all their possessions. They can choose to do this or choose not to do it.

On the other hand, which I prefer theologically, *ou dynamai* can refer to something that is impossible for the crowd to do. That is, it is impossible for humans to meet the demands of discipleship even if they wanted to choose it.

In addition, Luke has told us near the beginning of this gospel that 'nothing will be impossible (adynateo) with God' ...

I'm not sure that it is possible for most of us to hate our family, to bear our crosses, or to give up all our possessions -- even with these promises given in ch. 18? Does that mean that it is impossible for us to be Jesus' disciples? With mortals, it is impossible, but God makes the impossible happen.

Another approach might center on the large (enthusiastic?) crowd who have joined the Jesus party (who are on their way to Jerusalem). These aren't people whom Jesus has called, but closer to the people who approach Jesus in Luke 9:57-62 wanting to follow him. Jesus insists that following him has to come before everything else. The harsh words of discipleship are addressed to these enthusiastic followers. Will they have enough strength to follow all the way? [But not even those whom Jesus called had enough strength!]" (BPS)

NOT ABLE TO BE MY DISCIPLE (Cont.)

Green (The Gospel of Luke) writes: Often in the Lukan account, crowds are presented as pools of neutral persons from whom Jesus might draw disciples, and this is clearly the case here. In light of Jesus' message in 13:26-27, however, one should not immediately be overly sanguine about the realization of their potential as disciples; many, according to Jesus, will claim to have associated themselves with Jesus' teaching both at the table and on the road, but their fundamental allegiances will not have been altered. Such persons cannot be identified as disciples. [p. 565]

In a sense, our text repeats and corrects the dinner conversation that occurred just before our text (vv. 15-24). In that text, there were three who were unable to attend the "great banquet" to which they had been invited. They had their excuses. In essence, there were other

things that were more important to them than attending this great banquet. After this rejection of the invitation, everybody -- all the "dead beats" in town and out of town are invited to the banquet. They are compelled to come so that the house might be full. There were no requirements put on them, except to come.

On one hand, our text repeats the necessity of putting Jesus first -- before everything else in our lives. Following Jesus is extremely demanding. On the other hand, "street people" are invited to and come into the banquet with great ease. The only "demand" was to come and eat and enjoy the feast that had been prepared.

Do we not live in that tension of free grace and costly discipleship? Is there a difference between believing in Jesus and being a disciple? Being an active church member -- receiving Jesus in Word and Meal, and being a disciple?" (BPS)

- 14:27 "In verse 26, Jesus called us to hate even our own life. Now he calls us to carry our **cross**, the instrument of our death. Luke is writing to Christians who know what cross-bearing means. Persecution has begun, and Christians are dying on crosses. For the person desiring casual discipleship, Jesus' words about cross-bearing would be discouraging — but for Luke's church, experiencing persecution, these words would ratify their sacrifices." (L)
 - "Again, as in 9:23, bearing the **cross** is used as a metaphor of discipleship—indeed, as a requirement for one's identity as a disciple." (JG, 565)
 - "The Roman government executed criminals by crucifixion (death on a **cross**)."
(LSB,1730)
- 14:27 "Culpepper (*Luke*, New Interpreter's Bible) presents a corrective to an interpretation of this phrase. 'The language of cross bearing has been corrupted by overuse. Bearing a cross has nothing to do with chronic illness, painful physical conditions, or trying family relationships. It is instead what we do voluntarily as a consequence of our commitment to Jesus Christ. Cross bearing requires deliberate sacrifice and exposure to risk and ridicule in order to follow Jesus. This commitment is not just a way of life, however. It is a commitment to a person. A disciple follows another person and learns a new way of life. [p. 293]" (BPS)
- 14:27 "If Jesus is their center, then the cross is their way. The cross is the symbol of leading a persistent and peaceful life in a violent world ... They are to move into those places where no semblance of kingdom living can be found and bring the kingdom possibility ... Carrying the cross means taking on the healing of the earth in the most radical way." (JS, 252)
- 14:27 "Discipleship is defined by following Jesus and 'carrying the cross.' This phrase indicates that giving up self-interest and competing loyalties are central to discipleship. Neither of these sayings of Jesus lend themselves to an 'easy believism' or a 'low-cost' form of faith. Instead, they stress the high cost of following Jesus." (Brown, WP)

Reflection Question:

- "... define being Christian, being Jesus' disciples, being Jesus' followers. Are all these terms synonymous? What are God's responsibilities in making us Christian? What are our responsibilities in being Christian?" (BPS) Ponder these questions and journal.
- How do you interpret Jesus' statement about family? Have you encountered any difficulty in the area of allegiance to your family and allegiance to God? If yes, journal.
- What does Jesus' words "carry the cross and follow him" mean to you? How do you see that happening in your life? Or do you wish for it to happen?

Day 3

Luke 14:28-32

²⁸For 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? ²⁹Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, ³⁰saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' ³¹Or 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? ³²If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace.

Background:

- 14:28-32 "On one hand, one should know about the costs of following Jesus and not just 'go along with the crowd,' but on the other hand, we don't know exactly what 'crosses' may be before us." (BPS)
- 14:28-32 "The illustrations are very practical, and they are traditional themes. In Prov. 24:3-6, one instructed by wisdom builds a house wisely and wages wars with wise counsel. It is simply foolish to undertake a task without carefully (i.e., **sitting down**, vv. 28, 31) calculating what will be necessary." (DT, 270-271)
- 14:28-32 "This following of Jesus should not be mindless. The disciples are to think about what it entails ... If you cannot see it through and you are certain you will be overwhelmed, it is better not to begin. There is a need to assess your resources and evaluate your resolve ... A decision should be made with all the practical wisdom of a cost-conscious builder and a battle-hardened king ... The two parables take the crowds beyond abstractly considering discipleship. They make them consider questions of readiness and risk." (JS, 253)
- 14:28 "This is a good metaphor for Christian discipleship. When we first decide to follow Christ, we know only that there will be a price to pay. Only as life unfolds can we begin to assess the full cost. Jesus warns at the outset that the price will be high." (L)
- 14:29-30 "the 'suffering' of the unfinished builder is being **mocked [ridiculed]**-- exactly the same fate that Jesus suffered before and during his crucifixion. If we are called to 'bear a cross' -- to face possible death, why should we worry about simple 'mocking?' 'Being mocked' sounds a lot healthier than dying!" (BPS)
- 14:32 "...**when we can finally admit that 'I can't,' then we are open to God's 'I can.'**" (BPS)

Reflection Questions:

- What impact does being a disciple of Jesus have on your life?
- Have you considered the cost of being a disciple of Jesus? If yes, what are the costs you see? Are you able to handle the cost? Journal.

Day 4

Luke 14:33

³³So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

Background:

- "In this Gospel, Jesus speaks often of material possessions (12:13-21, 22-34; 16:13; 18:18-25; 19:8; see also Acts 2:44-45; 4:32 – also written by Luke).
Becoming a Christian requires repentance — turning in a new direction. Jesus makes it clear that becoming a Christian means a turning toward God and a turning away from concern for possessions." (L)

- “In a couple of other texts, we've seen Luke's emphasis on getting rid of possessions. The word translated ‘give up’ (NRSV) is *apotasso*. The other occurrence of this word in Luke comes in the would-be followers of Jesus, which, as I suggested in an earlier comment, may be the closest parallel to this text. In 9:61 one of those wishing to follow says, ‘I will follow you, Lord; but let me first **say farewell** to those at my home.” Usually *apotasso* is translated, ‘farewell’ or ‘good-bye.’ When one says those words, they usually leave the other person -- so the word also means ‘to leave behind.’” (BPS)
- “Now the third cost is identified in terms which are very familiar in Luke’s Gospel, the renouncing [**giving up**] of personal possessions.
- “This whole section has stressed what makes one unable to be a disciple: not hating family members; not bearing one's cross; not "counting the costs"; not giving up possessions.
On one hand, Jesus makes it very difficult to be his disciple. It will cost us everything and we need to know the cost before ‘jumping’ in. On the other hand, Jesus may be making it impossible to be his disciple on our own abilities? When we confess, ‘I can't,’ then we are open for God's ‘I can.’” (BPS)
- “Attachments to family, personal safety, and financial security are all at risk in this building project (vv. 28-30), this campaign (vv. 31-32) of the Messiah and his kingdom. This is not a ‘kingdom’ which people can build or a battle they can wage on their own. But even as followers of this Messiah, no one ought to ‘sign up’ for the duration without understanding the costs involved.” (DT, 271)
 - “Possessions are whatever we hold onto that competes with our communion with Jesus and cooperation with his mission. They are substitute absolutes. It is not just a matter of freeing ourselves from material holdings or social positions—an outer-world dispossession. It is also a matter of purging our mind of its security fantasies and its habits of violent domination—an inner-world dispossession. An essential step of discipleship is selling what we have that keeps us from integrating the mind and actions of Christ into our minds and actions.” (JS, 254)
- “With regard to laying out the conditions of discipleship, [this verse] parallels vv 26 and 27; it does so, however, not by adding a third condition but by summarizing all other conditions ... if one is truly to join Jesus on the journey, one must ‘bid farewell to all one has’ ... As is generally the case in Luke, one’s basic commitments are manifest or symbolized in the disposition of ‘all one has.’ Accordingly, the distinctive property of disciples is the abandonment with which they put aside all competing securities in order that they might refashion their lives and identity according to the norms of the kingdom of God.” (JG, 567)

Reflection Questions:

- What does it mean to you to “give up all your possessions?”
- What has it cost you to follow Jesus? What attachments have you had to let go of to follow Jesus? What attachments still get in the way of your discipleship?

Day 5

Reread the entire Scripture:

- Does anything significant or new stand out for you with this reading?
- After studying and meditating on this Scripture, what do you think God might be saying to you?

Reread the entire Scripture again.

- What prayer rises up in you (what would you like to say to God) after reflecting (listening to what God had to say to you) on this Scripture?

Reflection questions:

- “If someone says: ‘I want to be a Christian,’ or ‘I want to follow Jesus’ or ‘I want to be a member of your church,’ what should we tell them? What does this text say to them?” (BPS)
 - Ponder and journal this question.

From David Lose, (2010) Luther Seminary
Working Preacher

“Perhaps the largest challenge most congregations I know face -- indeed, what the twenty-first century church faces, to be quite honest -- is to overcome the disconnect most Christians experience between what we do on Sunday and what we do the rest of the week. That is, very few of our people find something in what we say in the sermon, what we do during worship, and what we hear in Scripture that actually helps them make sense of their lives in the world. They are faithful people, don't get me wrong. But most of the folks who listen to our sermons week in and week out haven't been taught or trained to see their labor as holy, to see their everyday efforts as important to God, to imagine that they are God's partners in doing God's work in the world.

... We rarely intentionally nurture the imagination of our people to believe that God is at work in them and through them for the sake of the world God loves so much. And this is where this week's Gospel reading comes in. We've been trained somewhere to think that when Jesus talks about ‘taking up the cross’ he's referring to some major spiritual travail. Or at least significant suffering or sacrifice, preferably on behalf of the faith. But what if it's simpler than that? What if it's more ordinary? Here's what Alan Culpepper says: "The language of cross bearing has been corrupted by overuse. Bearing a cross has nothing to do with chronic illness, painful physical conditions, or trying family relationships. It is instead what we do voluntarily as a consequence of our commitment to Jesus Christ."²

If this is true, then we are invited to take up our cross -- that is, have our life shaped by our commitment to the crucified messiah -- anywhere, anytime, and doing just about anything. Voters and volunteers, websites managers and temp workers, bus drivers and barbers, students and secretaries, parents and payroll officers -- all of these people, when they offer their time, talent, and labor to God, are bearing their cross by allowing the whole of their lives to be shaped by their commitment to Christ.”

From Stephen P. McCutchan, *Water from the Rock*

“By the use of what is generally considered Middle-Eastern hyperbole, Jesus confronted potential disciples with the cost of discipleship...The essential truth that is conveyed through these examples and our reaction to them is that we are shaped by our attachments. While we often have a hierarchy of the attachments in our lives, and they sometimes shift in varying circumstances, we all have our personal set that shapes who we are.

To follow Jesus is to give a different priority to the attachments of our lives. Jesus recognized that the two primary sets of attachments in most people's lives were those that they have to their family and their possessions ... To follow Jesus can challenge our loyalty to both sets of attachments ... How are we to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind if we are so attached to other people or things that we are not free to respond fully to the love of God?” SPMc, 261-262)

- Good question! Journal your response to this question.

Psalm 1

- ¹Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers;
- ²but their delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law they meditate day and night.
- ³They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper.
- ⁴The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
- ⁵Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
- ⁶for the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.