

**PARK HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST  
REV. JOHN L. THOMPSON  
“EVERY DREAM COMES WITH A PRICE”  
LUKE 14:25-33  
September 5, 2010  
10:00 A.M. SERVICE**

Jesus never twisted arms to get people to follow him. To the contrary, he urged them to count the cost of discipleship. He wanted them to know the demands their faith would make on them.

All of us have promises to fulfill and commitments to keep. The challenge of living is often to simply finish what we have started. Somewhere between the beginning and the end we will be tempted to give up.

We are born dreamers. We dream of doing great things with our lives. But dreaming is not enough. Every dream comes with a price. Each goal has a cost. It is far better that we calculate what a venture will require of us in advance, than discover to our shame that we are unable or unwilling to fulfill our chosen enterprise.

Reputations are often undeserved. When based on vague impressions or inaccurate information, a reputation can miss the reality of a person by a mile. In his own time Jesus was said to be *“a glutton and a drunkard,”* and *“a friend of tax collectors and sinners.”* Today Jesus is often seen as too idealistic and other-worldly to be taken seriously. Jesus, however, was thoroughly practical, and believed that things should be worth what they cost.

**Jesus’ disturbing invitation.**

Jesus was not reared amid Greek colonnades and Athenian philosophers. He grew up in a Palestinian carpenter’s home, and very likely worked alongside Joseph. Nazareth was a small, ordinary Galilean town. Jesus spent his life among common people whose daily survival depended on their practicality and ingenuity. In today’s lesson Jesus demonstrates the kind of practical orientation we would

expect from someone with his background. Once, when multitudes pursued him, Jesus turned and uttered words that were startling and confusing. He said to become his disciples they would need to “*hate*” their family members and even their own lives, and they would need to take up their crosses and follow him. This is shocking even to us! The truth is, most of us are attracted to Jesus because we hear him promise peace, joy, and eternal life. Was Jesus trying to discourage people from following him?

Jesus wanted no confusion about what might be required of those who followed him. He was encouraging people to consider the possible costs of discipleship. The examples Jesus used reveal his knowledge of practical matters such as building construction and military preparedness. If you want to build a tower, he said, you do not begin until after you have determined what it will cost and whether you can afford it. Otherwise, laying the foundation may take all your money, and people will mock you for your shortsightedness. In the same way, a king will not wage war on another king without first determining whether he has enough troops. If he does not, he will change his plans and send emissaries to propose a peace treaty.

Here we see that Jesus was at home in the real world of practical matters. We also see an illustration of Jesus’ integrity. He does not recruit followers with anything but the truth, as unpleasant as it may seem.

### **The cost of following Jesus.**

We must always consider Jesus’ words within their original setting. If his words here seem unnecessarily harsh, we must remember that the crowds that followed him had a decidedly mistaken idea about where he is going. They saw in Jesus the fulfillment of all their messianic hopes and dreams. They had fantasized all their lives about another King David and a new golden age for Israel. They had lived far too long under the domination of Rome and in seemingly endless poverty. They wanted a Messiah-King to set them free, fill their stomachs, and restore their national pride. The destiny that awaited Jesus would have been inconceivable to these people - - - betrayal, public humiliation, cruelty, and crucifixion. The very last of all the possibilities they might have considered was that a similar fate might come to them if they followed him.

Stephen was a leader in the Jerusalem church. He is portrayed in Acts as bold, wise, and filled with the Holy Spirit. Stephen’s activities were reported to the Sanhedrin, the supreme court of the Jews. They saw him as undermining their

influence. Acts 7 contains Stephen's defense, which is a narrative on how Hebrew history led inevitably to Jesus. Stephen was killed by stoning, without a judicial hearing, becoming the first Christian martyr. It is for each disciple to make such a commitment to Christ that the possibility of losing everything is not unthinkable. It means an unswerving commitment to the will of God, even in the face of life's greatest threats and dangers. Physical death for one's faith may be unlikely for most Christians, but a dying to one's self is at the heart of what it means to live for Christ. Then, self-centeredness is replaced by Christ-centeredness.

### **The worth of knowing Christ.**

Determining worth can be very difficult. How do we find the true value of something? If it is property, we have it appraised. If it is an art object or a piece of jewelry, we find someone who is qualified to evaluate its current worth, or its resale or replacement value. If it is not a physical object, however, its worth may be primarily subjective. What is it worth to me? It is one thing to determine the worth of a diamond, but another thing altogether to determine the worth of a person's love. The most valuable things are not subject to standardized calculations.

When Paul encountered Christ he already had an impressive resume. Well-educated, skilled in tent-making, a Roman citizen from Tarsus, he had become a leading Pharisee. Years later he wrote to the Philippians that all he had ever achieved or possessed he now considered of no value compared to ***“the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.”*** He wrote, ***“I have suffered the loss of all things . . . in order that I may gain Christ.”*** Approaching his final years, the great Apostle cares only ***“that I may know [Christ] and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”***

Is following Christ worth what it costs? What if it costs one's life? The most convincing evidence comes from the long line of Christian martyrs. The martyr is not one who seeks death, but one who accepts it as a final opportunity to bear witness to Jesus Christ. The martyrs' testimony is, ***“To live is Christ, and to die is gain.”***

Runners tell us that there are two critical points in a race - - getting a fast start and making a strong finish. The longer the race, the less important the fast start and the more important the strong finish. Life is a long race. Many of us have gotten off to poor starts, for one reason or another. But we are given time and

opportunity to make up for those early stumbles. The challenge is to run the course and finish the race. Life is not judged by where we start but how we finish.

One hundred years ago this church started in a tent. Life is not judged by where we start but how we finish. The next 100 years are up to us. It is a dream and every dream comes with a price. If you are willing to pay the high cost of discipleship, to run the course and finish the race, I would love to be your pastor. I would love for this to be your church. And yes, every dream comes with a price.

## PRAYER

Let us pray for all who need endurance and hope:

That parents will meet their responsibilities to their children.

That religious leaders will be true to their calling and their ordination.

That politicians will make good on their promises to the people.

That newly-weds will keep their vows against all compromises.

That recovering alcoholics will stay with their program.

That reconciled friends will maintain their loyalty to each other.

Lord God, we have too often failed to finish what we have started. Forgive us for the ways we have failed you and other people. Renew our strength. Lift our vision to our true horizon. Help us to trust in you for the spiritual resources we need. Keep us in your care until our race has been run. For the sake of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen.**