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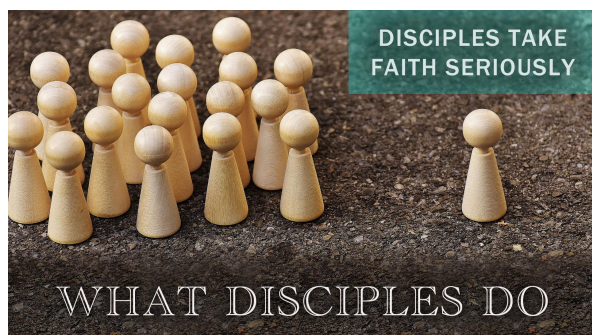
**Title:** What Disciples Do: Disciples Take Faith Seriously

**Preaching:** Ryan Hazen, Lead Pastor, Mud Creek Campus

**Text:** [Luke 14:25-33](#)

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[Watch the service](#)



Every fall—I know, it’s technically not fall yet but every year, post-Labor Day—we’ve tried to impress the importance of four practices of Christian discipline: worshiping, connecting with others in small groups, serving inside and outside the church, and giving generously. This year, however, Pastor Danny and I thought that approach might have run its course, but we’re not ready to fully give up on teaching what it means to follow Christ.

This year, using the Gospel of Luke and the two letters to Timothy, we’ll take a look at what we should be about in our Christian life as we make this turn from the last days of summer into a new rhythm in this new season. We’ve called this series, *What Disciples Do*. We’ll let the best of the earliest disciples of Jesus be our guide—disciples (small “d”) meaning all of those early followers, not just the twelve. Today’s lesson may be the hardest because the scripture that Danny and I have chosen for today is chock full of hard things to put into practice. It’s full of hard passages, and even though it’s only seven sentences long, it covers a lot of ground. This short scripture addresses family relationships, building a tower, going to war and giving up all your possessions.

I’ve been thinking we need a new catchy banner to put up on the corner—something to let people know what Geist Christian Church is all about, something really to draw in the people. Here’s what I’m thinking. Let me know what you think. “Geist Christian Church—Join us as we...hate our family and give everything away.” It has a ring to it, don’t you think? Kind of catchy! Should bring in lots of people.

Well, probably it’s not the best branding idea I’ve ever had. Most of us would be drawn to something more like a Norman Rockwell painting. Kids sitting quietly around a Sunday school table with their hands folded in prayer, a sanctuary filled with light coming through the stained-glass window. The banner might say, “Come and worship for one hour and be done for the week. Don’t think about your faith for another six days.”

Then we hear Jesus. This is not just someone else telling us what they thought they heard Jesus say. This is Jesus himself. There are a bunch of people following him when he says,

“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. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26-27).

We might just as well give up now. We’re not going to do that. That sounds like work. Clearly, none of us has what it takes. One commentator said, “If Jesus were in charge of an average congregation, I figure there would be about four people left there on Sunday mornings, and chances are those four would be fooling themselves. Jesus would greet newcomers by saying, ‘Are you absolutely sure you want to follow this way of life? It will take everything you have. It has to come before everything else that matters to you. Plenty of people have launched out on it without counting the cost, and as you can see they are not here anymore. The other thing is, if you succeed—if you really do follow me—it will probably get you killed. Why don’t you go home and think it over? I would hate for you to get in over your head.’”<sup>1</sup>

What in the world is this passage about? How are we to understand it and still have any hope of being even a mediocre follower of Jesus? The first thing is to look at the context. That’s what I tell people when I teach a Bible study. Know the context—know when and to whom it was written. Know what was going on in the world. Know the speech patterns. Even understanding English doesn’t guarantee full understanding. I was struck as I listened to the BBC following the Queen’s death on Thursday that there are figures of speech that were foreign to me. The same is true of Greek and Hebrew and Aramaic when placed in their regional contexts.

Our passage starts out by saying, “Large crowds were traveling with Jesus...” This itinerant rabbi named Jesus had become popular, and suddenly, like a rock star, the groupies had begun to gather. They had heard about his preaching and teaching; they had especially heard about his miracles; they wanted to get close to this incredible character and experience the unusual energy that seemed to surround him. Some of the more serious ones no doubt thought that perhaps this indeed was the Messiah the nation had longed for, the one who would deliver them all from the hand of the Roman legions. One way or the other, this guy had promise.

But Jesus is less than encouraging. He tells them their high hopes may be writing a check that reality cannot cash. There is more to this disciple business than meets the eye. He suggests that they go home and do some serious thinking about whether or not they are ready for commitment. To tell you the truth, I suspect many who heard him that day were as puzzled by what he said and just wanted a miracle that he might offer.

The hard passage is obviously the one about hating our parents, our children, even our very lives. The best way to understand it is to realize that Jesus was using a figure of speech we do not use anymore. In Aramaic, the word we translate “hate” has nothing to do with an emotion. It was a way of expressing priorities. So if I say, “I love the Colts and hate the Texans,” it would not mean I feel hostile toward anyone on the Texans football team or even anyone in the state of Texas. If I said, “I HATE THE TEXANS” in Jesus’ day, they would have looked at me funny and wondered what Texans were, but they would have understood hate as a preference, a priority. In Jesus’ day, the way you stated a preference was by pairing two things and saying you loved one and hated the other. It had nothing to do with feelings.

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, “High-Priced Discipleship,” *Bread of Angels*, (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1997), pp. 46

The word hate in this context is a way of expressing detachment. It doesn't have the same meaning as when your pre-teen screams, "I hate you!" because you make them put their cell phone in your room at night. When Jesus uses the word hate, it does not displace the word love. In a strange sort of way – in a way that perhaps only the gospel of Christ can do it, hate becomes a partner of love. This may just be the only case in which these two words—hate and love—go together.

But still, that doesn't remove the tension, does it? There is a real honest-to-goodness tension that exists when hate and love decide to become good friends. And to be a real honest-to-goodness follower of Jesus, you have to live with the tension that comes when Jesus demands your primary allegiance. It means you have to turn your back on living life on your own terms and not his. It means you have to let Jesus be the Lord of all your relationships and of every last penny of your possessions.

The issue Jesus was addressing to the crowd was about their priorities and not about their family relationships. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. He knows what lies ahead. With the benefit of 20/20 hindsight, Luke knows even more. When he wrote his gospel, Christians were already being persecuted for following Jesus. To have a Christian in the family was dangerous for everyone because the Romans were thorough. If they found one believer in a household they would arrest everyone, so it really was true that turning toward Jesus meant turning away from your family, whether you wanted to or not. Once you made following Jesus your first priority, everything else fell by the wayside—not because God took it away from you but because that was how the world worked. *You* made the choice.<sup>2</sup>

Will Willimon, the former dean of the chapel at Duke University, tells the story that he once got a call from an upset parent, a *very* upset parent. On the other end of the line, the parent said, "I hold you personally responsible for this."

"Me?" Willimon asked, "What did I do?" As the conversation went on, it became clear that this father was upset because his graduate school-bound daughter had just informed him that she was going to take time off ("throw it all away" was the way the father described it) and go do mission work with the Presbyterians in Haiti. "Isn't that absurd!" shouted the father. "A degree in mechanical engineering from Duke, and she's going to dig ditches in Haiti."

Willimon tried to ease the tension, "Well, I doubt that she's received much training in the Engineering Department here at Duke for that kind of work, but she's probably a fast learner and will probably get the hang of ditch-digging in a few months."

"Look," said the father, "this is no laughing matter. You are completely irresponsible to have encouraged her to do this. I hold you personally responsible," he said. As the conversation continued, Dr. Willimon tried to point out that the well-meaning but obviously unprepared parents were the ones who had started this ball rolling. *They* were the ones who had her baptized, read Bible stories to her, took her to Sunday School, let her go with the Presbyterian Youth Fellowship to ski in Vail. Will said, "You're the one who introduced her to Jesus, not me." Finally, the father confessed, "But all we ever wanted her to be was a Presbyterian."<sup>3</sup>

It's a little fun to take a jab at the Presbyterians, but the joke appears to be on us. Have you looked at the name of our church body recently? We are a part of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Disciples of

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 47

<sup>3</sup> William Willimon, Pulpit Resource, Sept 10, 1995.

Christ? What were they thinking when they picked that name? Jesus tells those following him—those disciples—that they better be ready to take their faith seriously. They better be ready to give it top billing in every aspect of their lives.

Barbara Brown Taylor says Jesus wouldn't have made a very good parish minister, and judging from our scripture, I think she has a pretty good point.<sup>4</sup> Jesus says, you'd better sit down and think about this before you commi. Think about it as one who prepares to build a tower or one who prepares to go to war. Counting the cost. "Whoever does not," Jesus is saying to them, "cannot."

I would think that would thin out the crowd that was following Jesus in a hurry. In this part of the story, Jesus asks his disciples both then and now to sacrifice. Actually, he doesn't ask. He tells us that he expects, even demands, undivided loyalty. This is why we are asked to count the cost. The Christian life is expensive; it demands our commitment in terms of our time, attention, and money. Jesus is talking about the cost of discipleship. He is talking about sacrifice.

People sacrifice for lots of things. Parents sacrifice for their kids, grandparents for their grandkids, employees for their futures, their jobs. We make sacrifices because these things are important to us. You sacrifice according to your priorities. And in today's passage, Jesus is saying that the Kingdom of God he proclaims and the kingdom life he exemplifies should be a priority. Actually, it's not "*a*" priority; it should be "*the*" priority.

Discipleship is never a cheap thing. Jesus proved it when he went to the cross in our place. Now, two thousand years after Jesus lived on earth, there is still something exciting and magnetic about this Jesus of Nazareth who draws people to him. It must be the power of God behind his word and the authority with which he calls us to serve him even now. Following Jesus is not an easy thing, but his word is still the best news this world has ever heard for bad times or good, and that is what you and I are called to remember together. Discipleship is a demanding thing. Discipleship is a delightful thing. And discipleship is a determined thing. If you say you would follow Jesus, do it with all you are and with all you have.

Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> Taylor, "High Priced Discipleship," p.52,