

Our theme for this morning's meditation is the 'Cost of Discipleship'. The dictionary defines a disciple as a follower of a leader. In the text that was read to us from Luke's Gospel large crowds were following Jesus. Were they all disciples? Or perhaps they may have presumed that they were disciples and that is the reason why they were following Jesus. Jesus then turns around to the large crowds and then lays out the conditions of discipleship. Three main conditions come out of his teaching. The first is that **Jesus must be top priority in our lives** more than even our very parents, siblings, spouse and ourselves. Secondly, **we are to deny ourselves and take up the cross and follow him**. To deny ourselves we are to die to the love of self, the love of praise, the love of possessions and the love of power. Finally, **we are told to count the cost before we make a decision to be a follower of Jesus** because the cost is great. Let us now look at each of these conditions.

Jesus says that if one does not **hate** their parents, their spouse, their siblings or themselves then they cannot be his disciple. The word **hate** is a very strong term. So maybe we can think that this seems to be contrary to the Ten Commandments where we are asked to honour our parents. So what is Jesus actually saying? Jesus is saying that he has to be the first in our lives. Priority has to be given to him. Everybody else has to fall in after him. Hate here means to **love less** rather than to hate in the literal sense of it. This applies not just to our parents and others but also to ourselves. More than our own self-interests we are called to follow kingdom interests.

Jesus then lays out the second condition which is to take up one's cross and follow him. In Luke 9 Jesus says that "If anyone would come after me, he must **deny** himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." What does it mean to deny ourselves? Firstly, we are to **die to the love of self**. Everything revolves around our selves. We always think of what we can benefit out of any situation rather than thinking about the common good. Secondly, we are to **die to the love of praise**. Leaders are particularly prone to be flattered and they love to hear others singing their praises. This in turn breeds a group of sycophants who hang around the leader always and keep pumping them with their flattery. We are called to reject this. Thirdly, we are called to **die to the love of possessions**. Material things tend to promise us that life will be ok if only we possess them. We all know from experience that this is not true. So the love for accumulating needs to go if we want to be disciples. Finally, the **love for power needs to go**. Human beings enjoy power and they love to control others. Jesus on the contrary talks about us being weak and vulnerable and being servants of others.

Taking up the cross is the way of suffering, sacrifice and death. Jesus trod that path and calls us to follow him. The path he calls us to follow in is the narrow and the straight path and very few people are willing to take it. If we want to be his disciples then we too must be ready to walk this path of suffering and sacrifice and even at some point death. The cost is our own life and therefore we need to think clearly about it before we make any rash decisions to follow him.

Jesus then uses two illustrations to show the importance of counting the cost before we venture into any activity. He talks about a man who wanted to build a tower and then begins the work and lays the foundation. Once he does that he realizes that he has no money to finish the tower. People would laugh at him since he did not finish what he set out to accomplish. It would have been a bit like us starting the roof repair of the Church and then realizing that we did not have adequate money to do so! The second illustration that Jesus uses is that of war. If two kings were about to go to war the weaker king needs to make sure that he can defeat the enemy otherwise it would be better for him to make peace with his enemy. It is a bit like the 1971 war with Pakistan when India had double the amount of tanks and artillery and yet Pakistan chose to attack India and lost the war.

In both these illustrations Jesus is saying that we need to count the cost of being a disciple of Jesus before we plunge into taking that decision. There is a very heavy cost to pay as a disciple and we must be ready to pay it. May God help us to be true disciples who will give him first priority in our lives, and will be willing to deny ourselves and take up the cross daily and follow him knowing fully well that there is cost that must be paid.