

Sermon on the 13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost.

**Title: Carrying the Cross: What It Really Means to Follow Christ**

**Opening prayer:** Almighty God, we come before You with open hearts, ready to hear Your call. You have invited us to follow, to surrender, and to trust You with our whole lives. In this time of worship, quiet the noise around us and within us, so we may listen to Your voice clearly. Strengthen us to take up our cross daily and walk the path of discipleship with courage and faith. Bless this gathering, Lord, and lead us deeper into Your presence. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

**Introduction:** When we talk about following Jesus, we often highlight the blessings: forgiveness of sins, peace in the midst of life's storms, the joy of salvation, and the hope of eternal life. And all of these are true. Jesus Himself said, "Come to Me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). We love those words. We put them on church banners and coffee mugs because they speak to the comfort and grace Jesus offers to all who believe. But in **Luke 14:25-33**, Jesus gives us a very different picture—one that is far less comfortable and far more challenging. Instead of promising ease, He warns of difficulty. Instead of attracting the crowds with miracles and blessings, He tells them to count the cost before following Him. In fact, His words are so strong that some in the crowd may have been tempted to turn back and stop following Him altogether.

This passage is uncomfortable because it forces us to ask some hard questions: *Am I following Jesus on my terms, or His? Am I following Him because of what I hope to receive, or because I truly want to give Him my life? Am I willing to pay the price of discipleship?* You see, following Christ isn't about convenience; it's about commitment. It isn't about popularity; it's about priority. And it isn't about cheap grace—grace that costs us nothing; it's about **costly grace**—grace that demands our whole lives. As theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said, "*When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die.*" That's the kind of discipleship Jesus is talking about in this passage—a discipleship that demands everything but ultimately gives us everything in return.

**Exposition of the Text.**

**Loving Jesus Above All (v.26);** "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."

**Meaning of "hate" here:** The Greek word used here for "hate" (*miseō*) does not mean hatred in the emotional sense. It is a **Semitic idiom** used throughout Scripture (e.g., Genesis 29:30-31; Malachi 1:2-3) to mean "*love less by comparison.*" Jesus isn't calling for cruelty or bitterness toward family; He is demanding **supreme loyalty** above all other relationships.

**Why this matters:** Family loyalty in Jewish culture was the foundation of life. Your identity, inheritance, and security came through family ties. For Jesus to say that loyalty to Him must

surpass even loyalty to parents, spouse, children, or siblings would have been **shocking and radical** to His audience. Today, we often face competing allegiances: family expectations, career ambitions, cultural norms, and personal comfort. Jesus is clear: when any of these come into conflict with His call, **He must come first**.

Think of a soldier on the battlefield. His loyalty to his commanding officer and mission takes priority over personal comfort and even family desires because the mission demands it. In the same way, following Christ requires undivided loyalty. Following Jesus requires radical loyalty even when it conflicts with personal relationships, traditions, or personal comfort.

**Carrying the Cross (v.27)**; “Whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” **Cultural weight of “the cross”**: In the first century, the cross was a Roman tool of execution reserved for the worst criminals and rebels. To “carry the cross” literally meant carrying the horizontal beam of your own execution device to the place where you would die. Everyone in the crowd knew this image well it was a symbol of **shame, suffering, and death**. **For disciples**: Jesus is saying that following Him involves a willingness to **die to self**, to ambitions, pride, comfort, and even personal plans. Paul later echoes this in Galatians 2:20: *“I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.”*

Carrying the cross today means embracing sacrifice for Christ’s sake, whether it is sacrificing time, finances, comfort, or even reputation for the sake of obedience to Him. It is a **daily surrender, not a one-time event**. Think about missionaries who leave comfortable lives to serve in dangerous places, or believers who risk jobs or relationships because of their faith. That is carrying the cross today. Discipleship is a daily surrender, not a one-time decision.

**Total Surrender (v.33)**: “Those of you who do not give up everything you have, cannot be my disciples.” **What Jesus means**: This is not primarily about selling all possessions (though He sometimes calls for that, as in Luke 18:22). It is about **surrendering ownership** of everything, our money, careers, relationships, and ambitions, so that we no longer live for ourselves but for Him. **Why this matters**: Possessions and ambitions can easily become idols. Jesus wants His followers free from anything that competes with Him for first place in their hearts. This doesn’t mean every Christian must live in poverty. It does mean nothing we own should **own us**. Our possessions and talents must be tools for His kingdom, not rivals for our devotion. Think about someone who signs over power of attorney to another person; they give up control over decisions. In the same way, following Jesus means signing over the “rights” to our lives to Him.

### **Applications:**

Re-evaluate Our Priorities: *“Is Jesus first, or do we fit Him into the leftovers of our time and loyalty?”* We often let work, family, hobbies, or even church activities come before our personal relationship with Jesus. He doesn’t want to be one priority among many. He wants to be **the center of everything**. What to do: Take an honest inventory of your calendar, budget, and relationships. Do they reflect Christ as your top priority? What would change if Jesus truly came first in every decision? Jesus calls us to lay down our self-centeredness and live for Him. Therefore, each morning, pray, *“Lord, today I die to myself. Lead me where You want me to go.*

*Use my time, words, and resources for Your purposes.*” What to do: Maybe it’s forgiving someone who hurt you, choosing integrity at work when compromise seems easier, or sacrificing personal comfort to help someone in need. That’s daily cross-carrying.

**Count the Cost Before Committing;** *“Christianity isn’t a hobby; it’s a life-altering calling.”* Our culture often sells Christianity as an accessory to life, rather than a total transformation. But Jesus warns that following Him means **enduring hardship, rejection, and sacrifice**. Before making major life choices—career, relationships, finances—ask: *“How will this decision help me follow Jesus faithfully?”* Have you embraced Christianity for comfort or for Christ?

**Hold Possessions Lightly;** *“Use what you have for God’s kingdom, not for self-indulgence.”* We live in a world obsessed with wealth and status. Jesus reminds us that everything we own is temporary and it all belongs to Him. Jesus calls us to Tithe faithfully. Be generous toward missions, the poor, and those in need. Use your home, car, and resources as tools for ministry. Think of a steward who manages the king’s resources. He doesn’t own them but uses them for the king’s purposes. That’s how God calls us to view our money, talents, and possessions.

Conclusion: Following Jesus isn’t easy. It requires everything: our time, our loyalty, our ambitions, and our very lives. But here’s the good news: **It costs us nothing to be saved.** Salvation is a free gift by grace through faith. **But it costs us everything to follow Jesus,** because He demands our whole hearts. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German pastor executed for resisting the Nazis, said it best: *“When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die.”*

The question we must all ask is this: Are we **fans** of Jesus, or true **followers**? Are we willing to put Him above everything, family, possessions, comfort, and even life itself? Real discipleship is costly, but it’s worth it. Because when we carry the cross, we discover the life Christ promised: forgiveness for the past, strength for today, purpose for living, and hope for eternity. So today, Jesus invites us not to cheap grace, but to **costly grace**, grace that transforms us, stretches us, and sends us out to live boldly for Him. **Will you take up your cross and follow Him?**

**Closing Prayer:** Gracious and loving God, we thank You for speaking to us today through Your Word. You have reminded us of the cost of discipleship, the call to surrender all, and the invitation to follow You wholeheartedly. Lord, help us not to be mere listeners but true followers. Give us courage to carry our cross daily, wisdom to count the cost, and strength to place You above all else in our lives. As we leave this place, fill us with Your Spirit so that our lives reflect Your love, our choices honor Your will, and our hearts remain faithful to Your call. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

**Benediction:** Go now as followers of Jesus Christ, ready to carry your cross, to love Him above all else, and to surrender all that you are into His hands. May the love of God the Father sustain you, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you, and the power of the Holy Spirit guide you as you walk the path of true discipleship today, tomorrow, and forevermore. Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord. Amen.