

## Counting The Cost

I am humbled and honored to stand before you this morning to open up God's word and share it with you.

Now may the God of the universe show us in this interesting passage of scripture how we are to count the cost of following Christ and share His love with all people that cross our path. Please be seated.

When I knew I was going to give a sermon, I looked at the lectionary. For those like me, who didn't know what a lectionary was, the simple explanation is that the lectionary is a calendar of scripture readings for worship services each week. I chose June 23d because the gospel reading was about Jesus Calming The Storm. I had had personal experience with that passage and was excited to share.

However, I found out that Cannon Martha was coming and she would be doing the sermon that day. I was shocked when she shared such an eloquent sermon celebrating Juneteenth. My next choices were July 7<sup>th</sup> or July 14<sup>th</sup>. I did not consult the lectionary this time, but chose today, July 14<sup>th</sup> so I would gain a little more strength after recovering from my open-heart surgery that took place on April 8<sup>th</sup>.

I consulted the lectionary and the gospel passage was Mark 6:14-29, which was about the party where Herod gave his wife the head of John the Baptist. I thought WOW! What will I be able to say about this? I mulled it over and consulted commentators and finally came up with what I thought were a few good points.

Then on July 1<sup>st</sup> I started to nap, but found myself wanting to write about John The Baptist's head. I got up and started writing. It was coming together; I couldn't write fast enough. I paused to read a text from Reverend Jen making sure I was on board for preaching on July 14<sup>th</sup>. She reminded me that it was the Sunday we celebrated the Feast of St. Benedict and the scripture passages were completely different than what I had been preparing for. Mmmm. Flexibility. I thought, I don't know much about him and he must be important if our parish is named after him.

So, here we are today, celebrating St Benedict of Nursia. Nursia is a small town in Italy where he was born in 480. I wondered how and why our parish was named after him. Lo and behold, I found the answer from our own Presiding Warden, Maureen Titus, in her message to us in the June/July 2024 edition of our newsletter, The Benediction. As a reminder or for those who haven't had a chance

to read it yet, she explained that the Reverend Thomas Doyle wanted a Benedictine Retreat Center in Los Osos. At the same time, a group of Parishioners from St. Peters in Morro Bay wanted to form an Episcopal Parish in Los Osos. Rev. Doyle was appointed as the first Priest for our current parish and he named us St. Benedict's In The Valley. I had my first answer as to the how. Now why this particular saint? St. Benedict is considered the Father of Western Monasticism. He started several monastic retreats training monks in what is now known as The Rule of St. Benedict. There are 73 chapters with 2 different kinds of focus, spiritual and administrative. I gleaned from my readings that prayer was the foundation of the rule on how to live the monastic life which also applies to the Christian life today. The main points consisted of prayer, work, study, hospitality, and renewal. Those qualities are a great challenge for us to live by both corporately as a parish and personally as followers of Christ. There is much more to be learned about St. Benedict. I will share from our Psalm passage that he was an example of Psalm 1:2." Their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law they meditate day and night."

This brings us to our gospel passage today in Luke 14. I am actually going to start with verse 25 instead of 27 for what I believe is part of the full context. In verse 25 Luke is setting up the stage for Jesus to reveal to us 3 conditions of being a disciple or close follower of Jesus. "Now large crowds were traveling with him and he turned and said to them...lets pause before verse 26. It was not uncommon to have a lot of people following Jesus at that time. They might have been part of the feeding of the 5,000 or witnessed Jesus's healing of the crippled woman on the Sabath or many other miracles he had performed. These are not Jesus enemies, perhaps curious people wondering who this Jesus really was or true followers. We can see this today when a popular speaker comes to town and many go to hear him or her. Are they all true followers or just curious or possibly following the crowd to look good? VS26 in The Common English Translation "Whoever comes to me and doesn't hate father and mother, spouse and children, and brothers and sisters—yes even one's own life-- cannot be my disciple.

Is Jesus telling us to hate our family and ourselves? That seems so contradictory to who Jesus is. The word here for hate, according to Vines New Testament dictionary is Miso in Greek. This verb has several meanings, but it is the consensus of most commentators that hate could better be translated allegiance



or preference in this passage. There are many examples in the Old Testament of indicating preference in using the word hate. For example, Malachi references Jacob have I loved Esau Have I hated in Malachi 1:2B-3.

Therefore, the first thing Jesus is asking the crowd and us today is to put Jesus first in our lives above family, friends, and ourselves.

One example in my own life was when I was getting ready to leave for Bible College. I was a little over 17 and a half years old. My mother didn't want me to leave and asked me if I was going to be an educated Sunday School teacher. I went to that Bible College. I wish I could say that I always put Jesus first after that time, but that is not true.

Vs 27 Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. What does this mean to carry the cross? When Jesus said this most of this crowd probably understood that they needed to be willing to die in order to follow Jesus as a disciple. The Roman government at that time crucified its worst criminals on a cross. I'm sure this alone scared some of them off. What does it mean for us today to carry our cross? It might mean being willing to die for our faith or more likely to be willing to live for our faith. It could mean laying aside our strengths, including our ego; letting go of not getting our way, being vulnerable by acknowledging weakness and submitting to Christ's power. It could be a myriad of different things.

Whatever our cross might be, Jesus is saying we need to assess the cost of carrying it.

In verses 28—32 Jesus illustrates the importance of counting the cost by giving two scenarios. The first example was talking about a person building a tower, and making sure they have enough resources to finish it. Today we could apply that scenario to building a house or any type of financial endeavor.

The second scenario is about a military leader assessing the man power he has to start a battle and finish it. He should negotiate peace if he doesn't have enough to be able to defeat his enemy. These followers of Jesus would understand these illustrations well. I believe the application of this scenario is we must count the cost of following Jesus to the end, no matter what circumstances come into our lives.

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

Ouch! Jesus is meddling now. How many of us don't like to have anyone tell us how much to give from our wallets. I believe many of those followers felt the same way. I do not believe Jesus was asking them to give up all of their possessions. I believe he was being very dramatic for them to see the cost of truly following him. They very well could be called to give up their possessions. If we were to lose all of our material possessions, would we blame God and stop following Jesus?

Is Jesus calling us to give up our possessions? Or is He wanting us to be willing to follow Him no matter what the cost might be?

My questions to us today are:

Have we counted the cost of following Jesus on a daily basis?

Have we given our full allegiance and preference to Christ above all of those people in in our lives?

Are we willing to carry our cross whatever that may be?

Are we willing to give God our material possessions if He were to ask?

We are St. Benedicts! Is prayer our foundation? Do we prioritize what our name stands for...prayer, work, study, hospitality and renewal?

**WE ARE ST BENEDICTS!** Let us pray together one of our namesakes' prayers found in your bulletin on page 5.

Gracious and holy father, give us the wisdom to discover you, the intelligence to understand you, the diligence to seek after you, the patience to wait for you, eyes to behold you, a heart to meditate upon you and a life to proclaim you. Amen