Text: Luke 14:25-35

**Introduction**

I’m reliably told that labor day is something of the low tide for churches in the area. Snowbirds and the end of summer escapes from Valley heat bolster attendance. Which is good, because I’m going to start taking it personally if we don’t break the trend.

**Text**

This is painful for a former numbers guy to say, but Jesus just doesn’t seem to care about numbers. That may not be right. He does, but they are secondary things. They certainly don’t impact self-worth. And when you start sorting through Jesus’ reaction to numbers, his biggest reaction is exemplified by today’s text.

Wherever Jesus went he attracted a crowd. Now if you or I could perform miracles, especially on the scale that Jesus is reported to have done them, attracting crowds might not be that hard. A repeated refrain of the gospels is that “his fame spread far and wide.” Of course our translations typically wimp out. They say things like “the report about him went out through all the surrounding country.” To which I sigh, c’mon. Reports are things the blue ribbon committees produce and nobody reads. Reports are what you say you will produce in the hopes that all interest in the subject will die. And interest in Jesus didn’t die. It even today gets sustained through people who think “report” is a proper word to talk about the ministry of Jesus. The old King James – yes, tough for us to read today – but those translators got the big things, they understood the English language, “His fame grew everywhere.”

And when that fame reaches a fever pitch, where you could say he’s bigger than the Beatles, you get “Now great crowds accompanied Jesus.” Not just the normal crowds. Not just the county fair. But great crowds. The hoi polloi – the many. The state fair. An OSU-Norte Dame game in the horseshoe level crowd.

And if you and I could pull together such a great crowd, we’d probably do something like a Billy Graham crusade. And for anyone younger than me who doesn’t know what that is, just imagine a Christian preacher who could draw a crowd that not even your favorite musical act could today. Nobody besides the NFL puts together those crowds today. But I think that’s what we’d do. We’d preach Christ and call everyone down to the altar to receive the body and blood of Christ and then we’d do our best to get them connected to a local church. Such that whenever they gathered they’d do this in remembrance of Christ. And we’d do this because numbers matters. Everything counts in large amounts.

But Jesus never does this. Every time the crowds grow to great crowd level he does something like say “you must eat my flesh and drink my blood or you have no life in you.” Or he “dismisses the crowd’ that is trying to make him king and gets in a boat to sail away. Or he does what happens in today’s gospel text.

“If you don’t hate your father and mother…you can’t be my disciple.” O-Kay, Jesus.

And if such a saying isn’t enough. “Whoever doesn’t bear his own cross cannot be my disciple.”

And the typical reaction to such things is a thinning of the crowds. It isn’t here, but the response to the drink my blood line, I take as the normal crowd response. “This is a hard saying, who can listen to it…and many turned back and no longer walked with him.”

When the crowds reached the great crowd stage, Jesus always seems to think it is time to warn them exactly what they are following. Right here in Luke Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem and to his cross. He is walking toward a night when everyone including the twelve will leave him. And we follow his path.

**Discipleship and Its Enemies**

We just want the numbers. Jesus might want the numbers – God wants everyone to come to the knowledge of Jesus – but simple knowledge is not what Jesus is after. He wants your heart. Jesus wants disciples. And Jesus knows that discipleship is the way of the cross.

In this world, following Jesus means having three great enemies. I don’t think it’s a perfect alignment, but Satan is the King with 20,000 troops bearing down on you. And if you know your old testament, Gideon only got 300. Israel was always wildly outnumbered. Of course Yahweh consistently told them that He himself, the Divine Warrior, would fight on their side. The chariots and horsemen of Israel were never just what we can see. But Jesus is being generous when he talks about meeting the 20K with 10K. But every day we don’t fight with flesh and blood but with the powers and principalities of this dark realm. And if you think you have to do it yourself, you better go make the best deal you can before Satan gets close enough to you to count your personal troops.

In this world, the world itself is your enemy. And in this world you better count the cost. If you set out to build something and run out of money, it is worse than not starting. Especially if you are setting out to build something like a church faithful to the word of Jesus, this world is going to try and stop you from building that. The foundation is already there. Christ is the cornerstone. We believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. There is the full foundation. But building on that foundation of Christ and the Apostles? It is going to cost. The world will extract it. If you are going to be a disciple, know it.

Now, just like with Satan, Christ has already conquered the world. Building on any foundation that the world offers is building on the sand. Yes, the world will try and stop you from building on the rock, but that Rock is Mt. Zion – God’s holy hill. That rock is the only sure foundation. God has placed that cornerstone and when it fell on the world it smashed it to pieces. When you count the cost, be sure you understand what you are building. Something that will escape the fire, or something that will be burned up.

But you also have a third great enemy – our sinful flesh is what Paul would call it. We tend to water that down to our sinful nature. I can’t say from the pulpit what author Francis Spufford calls it in his book “Unapologetic”. But I think that is what Jesus is aiming at when he says you have to hate your father and mother…and even your own life. To be a disciple of Jesus is to know that even those closest to us, our own selves, are against our salvation by grace. If salvation was by lineage, or work, or numbers, or any of the things we are comfortable with, we’d be fine. But not even our very self can be trusted. There is nothing we have in ourselves that would enable us to follow this path.

“So, therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.” We think we have something. Especially if we have numbers. We don’t. Everything we have will fail against Satan. Satan asked to sift the apostles like wheat, and he did. They all fled. Peter denied his Lord. Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. But without faith, that is a hard saying who can hear it? And we can’t create faith ourselves. In fact all we are able to do, absent the intervention of the Holy Spirit, is sin. If we are clinging to things we have, we are not following Jesus.

But Jesus has walked the way of the cross, defeating Satan. Christ sends us his Holy Spirit such that we do receive the Word of God. He has called us by the gospel, enlighted us with his gifts, sanctifies and keeps us in the one true faith. And just as Christ is risen, we too shall rise. This flesh that is too much with us shall be replaced with the resurrection body. And all of this is given to us by the grace of God. If you don’t renounce all that you have, you can’t get these things.

You can look back at the world, and have the salt of the world in you – like Lot’s wife looking at Sodom. Or you can walk forward. Following Jesus toward Jerusalem, yes toward crosses, but also toward the New Jerusalem. That city we see in the distance whose founder and builder is God. You can have the Salt of the Holy Spirit in you. The salt of the living sacrifice. The savor of hope.

**Conclusion**

Jesus was never less than **The Truth**. Discipleship is both absolutely free, and terribly costly. And you have to reckon its worth.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear.