

“Do We Have to Pay Full Price?”
Luke 14.25-35

September 4, 2022

Year C: Sunday of Pentecost for September 4th

Ecumenical Service – Clark’s Park, Butte Montana

I’m sure you’ve heard this one before, but it’s a good one. A chicken and a pig were walking down the street one day and noticed some poor children who looked as if they hadn’t eaten anything for days.

Moved with compassion, the chicken said to the pig, “I have an idea! I believe between the two of us we could solve the world’s hunger problems. Your species and mine can give children a nice breakfast of ham and eggs, every morning.”

The pig thought about that for a moment and then said, “Well, for you, that would be a small sacrifice; but for me, that would be total commitment!”¹

I brought a toy of mine; those from Aldersgate know it. I have it sitting on my secretary’s desk as a reminder that no job is difficult. You come to a challenge and just push ... <Easy Button>

I will tell you; this button is amazing. For example, the other day I spoke to a group of people and since I was new and they didn’t know me, and I them, I started out with an introduction ... tell me your name and if you could have a superpower what would it be. I started with me – starting and stopping time. Think about it; you’re running late, especially to church and instead of risking a speeding ticket, running a stop sign, a fight with the family to get everyone out the door; you just click the stop time button and when you get there, start time again ... <Easy Button>

Or how many of you wake up just before your alarm goes off and you don’t feel rested. Well, with this superpower you stop time, sleep until you are ready to get up, and then start time again ... <Easy Button>

You know maybe the Easy Button should be a Superpower. Tough conversation ... <Easy Button>

Just before you weigh yourself, think light thoughts ... <Easy Button>

Need cash ... <Easy Button>

Now, you know where this is going. Today’s passage that Chuck will read for us really is the opposite of the Easy Button and for that, I have another toy ... <No>

All kidding aside, let’s listen to our passage.

25 Now large crowds were traveling with him, and he turned and said to them, 26 “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. 27 Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. 28 For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? 29 Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, 30 saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ 31 Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will

¹ Wayne Rice. *HOT Illustrations for Youth Talks: 100 attention-getting stories, parables, & anecdotes.* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: ZondervanPublishingHouse. 1993.) 63.

not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? 32 If he cannot, then while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. 33 So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions. (Luke 14.25-35)

Today, I have titled our message: "Do we have to pay full price?" Let's see a show of hands here. How many of you have sold a house? Not as a realtor. Did you start low and then increase the price? No <No> You started high so that would have room for negotiation. This week we put our house on the market back in Nebraska and we started as high as the realtor recommended; but here's the thing, when you are buying a house; buying a car; buying a big-ticket item; you don't want to pay full price. Stores know this; that is why they put a big sign in the window ... SALE. A friend we know had one child. When we went over to visit, they had an extra bedroom that they didn't use but it was full of clothes, baby clothes, clothes that were too small for their child; but she went through that room with my wife and told her what a bargain she got on each item. She was excited because she got at a SALE; she was convinced that she got a deal on clothes that her child was too old to wear.

Jesus isn't offering us the same deal. There is no easy button here. This is full price. This is kit and the caboodle. This is everything and the kitchen sink. This is, and I love this line, found in the Message interpretation: "simply put, if you're not willing to take what is dearest to you, whether plans or people, and kiss it good-bye, you can't be my disciple."

So, what should our reaction be to this passage? How should we respond to paying full price? Well, I've been a part of the church for a long time, and I know what many of us would say ...

<No>

Let me share a story ... a man named Jack who was walking along a steep cliff one day when he accidentally got too close to the edge and fell. On the way down he grabbed a branch, which temporarily stopped his fall. He looked down and to his horror saw that the canyon fell straight down for more than a thousand feet. He couldn't hang onto the branch forever, and there was no way for him to climb up the steep wall of the cliff.

So, Jack began yelling for help, hoping that someone passing by would hear him and lower a rope or something. "HELP! HELP! Is anyone up there? HELP!" He yelled for hours, but no one heard him. He was about to give up when he heard a voice.

"Jack. Jack. Can you hear me?"

"Yes, yes! I can hear you. I'm down here!"

"I can see you, Jack. Are you all right?"

Yes, but ... who are you, and where are you?"

"I am the Lord, Jack. I am everywhere."

"The Lord? You mean, GOD?"

That's Me."

"God, please help me! I promise -- if You'll get me down from here, I'll stop sinning. I'll be a really good person. I'll serve You for the rest of my life."

"Easy on the promises, Jack. Let's just get you down from there; then we can talk. Now, here's what I want you to do. Listen carefully."

“I’ll do anything, Lord. Just tell me what to do.”

“OK. Let go of the branch.”

“What?”

“I said, let go of the branch. Just trust Me. Let go.”

There was a long silence. Finally, Jack yelled, “HELP! HELP! IS ANYONE ELSE UP THERE???”²

I think we could change that line here ... When Jesus asks us to pay full price ... HELP! HELP! IS ANYONE ELSE UP THERE???

Now I have a confession to make. 2/3 of you do not know this about me; those from Aldersgate know part of this story. I HAVE SAT WHERE YOU ARE. A brief bio; I am a third generation pastor. I grew up in a parsonage. I went to a United Methodist college. I minored in religion. I went to seminary almost immediately out of college. And I served for 16 years in the professional ministry. I used to joke that I needed other people’s stories because I didn’t have the experience of sitting in the pews, listening to the pastor beg of my time, feeling the pressure to do more in the church, having that guilt feeling of attending my daughter’s soccer game versus doing some work on the parsonage. Then 10 years ago, I became you. I left behind the pulpit, went to work in the bank, served wine at a wine shop, delivered newspapers, even moonlighted with a mortuary. And when I did sit in the pews what did I hear ... hey Seth, would you help start our youth group ... hey Seth, the Jr. High Sunday School needs a teacher ... hey Seth, I’ll be gone this Sunday, will you preach for me? Hey Seth, how about that Dave Ramsey course you taught, could you do that here?

The pastor of the church where I was attending knew I was a pastor and I’ll be honest; I just wanted to sit and listen to a sermon. I wanted my weekends to be with family; actually, have Saturday and Sunday to just take off camping or have a weekend jaunt; I liked being home in the evenings to help my daughters with homework and not worry about a church meeting. In fact, when I was serving wine, I never told anyone I was a pastor; and I’ll be honest with you, I heard a lot of things. Give people alcohol and think that a pastor is not around ... well, I heard a lot of honest discussions about the church.

So, I’ve been where you are; but there is this one line that kept ringing in my ear. Let me read it to you from Eugene Peterson’s perspective ... “Salt is excellent. But if the salt goes flat, it’s useless, good for nothing.”

I can’t speak for where you are, but what led me to say yes to teaching Sunday school and eventually Dave Ramsey again and then when I really felt God tugging at my heart to go back, was this idea that there is more to life. One of the reasons I left professional ministry was the unprofessionalism of those “higher ups” in the church; you know, making stupid HR decisions, and coupled with some burnout I had had enough. Then when I was working in the bank and eventually for a Credit Union and then for that wine place I saw the same thing, stupid hires, HR people not following their own rules, bosses triangulating employees, bosses who just made my life miserable. My salt was losing its saltiness. When I decided to come back to the professional ministry, I had breakfast with the Bishop at Perkins and I told him about my experiences in “the real world” and how I thought the secular world would do a better job; and the Bishop said to me. “Yes, the church and the secular world is full of human beings; you found that out.”

² *Ibid.*, 70-71.

And then he said this line that I'll never forget, "BUT THE CHURCH SHOULD DO BETTER."

This is a passage about challenges. I was looking for the easy button and I realized something, life isn't easy. Repeat that with me ... LIFE ISN'T EASY. Events won't go your way. Rainy days will happen. Churches in an ecumenical service will back out. A health crisis will hit you. A bill will come in the mail that you can't pay. Your spouse won't do what you ask. Your kid moves back in with you. Your favorite team keeps losing. Guess what, I'm pushing the easy button <EASY BUTTON> and it's not making any difference. Life doesn't offer us an easy button. So, what do we do? Well, Jesus offers us a solution. Pay full price. <NO> But I'll tell you why, the church is just like secular society, but in those words of that Bishop, should do better. When I give, I am making a step to be more like Jesus. When I serve the church, I am making a step to be more like Jesus. When I extend the hand to a stranger, I am taking a step to be more like Jesus. When I recognize my spiritual gifts and use them to good use, I am making a leaping to be more like Jesus. Jesus was a giver – Jesus gave all - and I want to be more like Jesus. I do not want my salt to go flat. I want to present myself to God and say, I did all I could with the life I had. No easy button here, so with the life I have I will try my best.

There was a certain man who was cautious in everything he did. When he saw people love each other, and he saw that love made strenuous demands on the lovers. He saw that love required sacrifice and self-denial. He saw that love produced arguments, jealousy, and sorrow. He decided that love cost too much. He decided not to diminish his life with love.

He saw people strive for distant and hazy goals. He saw men strive for success and women strive for high ideals. He saw that the striving was often mixed with disappointment. He saw that the striving was often mixed with disappointment. He saw strong and committed men fail, and he saw weak, undeserving men succeed. He saw that striving sometimes forced people into pettiness and greed. He decided that it cost too much. He decided not to soil his life with striving.

He saw people serving others. He saw men give money to the poor and helpless. He saw that the more they served, the faster the need grew. He saw ungrateful receivers turn on their serving friends. He decided not to soil his life with serving.

When he died, he walked up to God and presented his life to God – undiminished, unmarred, unsoiled. The man was clean and untouched by the filth of the world, and he presented himself to God proudly saying, "Here is my life!"

And God said, "Life? What life?"³

This passage is about getting dirty with life; no easy button; no chances to say no; but an opportunity to take a step toward Jesus. If you are worth your salt, then you and I will pay full price. Amen.

³ *Ibid.*, 221-222.