

Proper 18C
Luke 14:25-33
September 7, 2025

“No Better Day”
The Rev. Dr. Brandon Perrine

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 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.

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I’m not going to lie, for this Rally Sunday and Fall Festival Day, I was very, VERY, tempted to choose another text. Jesus’ words in this brief passage from Luke’s Gospel are hard – so hard. He declares that to be a disciple, followers must hate their families, take up their crosses, and give up all their possessions. Seriously, Jesus? I’m not sure who to blame for this: the architects of the Revised Common Lectionary or Jesus himself. I cannot think of a worse text to welcome back our church family and kick off another program year. And yet, here we are.

Misery loves company so perhaps you'll find it comforting to know that Jesus' original audience would have been put off by his words at least as much as we are. Likely more. "Family was the building block of the ancient world and central to survival."¹ These words would have hit their audience even harder than they do us, in the West today. Could Jesus really be saying that hate is a mark of faithful discipleship?

There seem to be three possibilities for interpreting Jesus' words:

1. Literally. Jesus is really saying that in order to follow him, would-be disciples must hate their families.
2. Contextually. The Hebrew Bible uses the word "hate" to mean something like "to love less." So based on contextual clues, we can deduce that Jesus isn't saying that would-be disciples must hate their families, just love them less than they love Jesus and his purpose.
3. Hyperbolically. In an effort to impress upon would-be disciples the cost of following him, Jesus exaggerates the price they should be willing to pay.²

It's times like these when I'm grateful to be serving at New England Congregational Church where we take scripture seriously, but not always literally. When Jesus tells would-be followers that the cost of discipleship is dear, he means it. And the decision to forsake all others, take up a cross, and follow him should not be undertaken lightly. Everything has a cost.

I'm reminded of the cautionary tale of a promising young architect. In 1883, at just 31 years of age, a promising young architect took over a project that would prove to be his life's calling – serving God, as he saw

¹ E. Trey Clark. "Commentary on Luke 14:25-33," Workingpreacher.org, September 7, 2025: <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-23-3/commentary-on-luke-1425-33-6>.

² Ibid.

it, through architecture. So engrossed in his project that he abandoned all other work after 1915. The architect eventually moved onto the construction site and lived in the workshop. After suffering financial ruin, the architect himself collected alms for the continuation of the project, known as “The Cathedral of the Poor.” In 1926, while walking to church, the architect was struck by a passing tram and rendered unconscious. Assumed to be a beggar, he received no immediate treatment, eventually being transported by taxi to hospital where he received basic care. Eventually the hospital chaplain recognized him, but it was too late for him to benefit from additional treatment and he succumbed to his injuries. Work continued, though, on his beloved project and continues to this day, more than 140 years after the cornerstone was laid.³

Had he known in 1883 the trajectory his life would take, I wonder if the architect would have counted the cost of this project and determined the price to be just too high. Had that been the case, the world would have been deprived of one of the greatest architectural masterpieces of all time. While I am certain that by now many of you are aware, the architect was Antoni Gaudi and the project was none other than the spectacular Basilica of the Holy Family, better known as Sagrada Familia, in Barcelona, Spain.

Everything has a cost, whether it’s following our vocational calling and giving our all, or it’s choosing to follow the path of Jesus.

In the statement of faith of the United Church of Christ, we read that we are called “into the church to accept the cost and joy of discipleship, to be servants in the service of the whole human family, to proclaim the gospel to all the world and resist the powers of evil.” In the covenant of membership of New England Church, we vow “to share in worship,

³ “Antoni Gaudí,” Sagradafamilia.org: <https://sagradafamilia.org/en/antoni-gaudi>.

“Antoni Gaudí,” Wikipedia.com: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antoni_Gaud%C3%AD.

communion, and care; to support the work of this church through our giving and our serving; to seek the welfare of this congregation and of our community; and to live and love like Jesus, as best we are able.”

The truth is, we *know* that everything has a cost, but in this country, and day, and age, we just don’t expect to have to pay it. So Jesus reminds us. He says that’s like starting a building project without knowing that you’ve got the capital to complete it, or going to war without knowing how many soldiers your opponent will bring to the field of battle – not very smart.

If we’re to walk this road together as the church of Jesus in this time and place, we’ve got to remember that it will cost us something and the price can be very high. But so can the joy. Now that I think of it, there’s really no better day to remember the cost of being the church than on the day we celebrate coming back together to be the church, and as we launch into a new program year, refreshed and ready to run the race and go the distance. And celebrate we shall – with food and fellowship, bouncy house and balloon creations, glitter tattoos, yard games, and karaoke! We’ll embrace the joy of discipleship together even as we acknowledge the cost. And together we’ll be the people we’re called to be, for the sake of all those who need us to be that very people in our world.

Even as we acknowledge the cost, we celebrate the joy of discipleship: the joy of belonging, the joy of walking together, the joy of living with purpose greater than ourselves. With eyes wide open, we step forward into a future filled with hope and promise. Amen.