**Sermon for Proper 18-C**

**Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Aiken, South Carolina**

09-07-25

Luke 14:25-35

It seems ironic that, for our gospel text, we have a heavy, undiluted dose of the law. Jesus flat out tells the people following him that they are simply not worthy to be his disciples. In a society that revolved around the family, he tells the people that, unless you hate your family, you cannot be his disciple.

 In a society where the ghastly sight of criminals impaled upon crosses to die was common, Jesus tells the people that, unless they bear their own cross and follow him, they cannot be his disciple.

 In a society where the average person owned very little, and having something to eat was often a daily uncertainty, Jesus tells the people that, unless they renounce all that they have, they cannot be his disciple.

In fact, Jesus tells them that, before you throw your lot in with him, you’d better first sit down and count the cost; and realize that it is too much for you to bear.

That’s what Jesus said. What are we to make of this? Is it that Jesus was really, really bad at evangelism and outreach? Who in the world would follow Jesus after he said these things?

I don’t know about you, but I am not about to leave my family, or give up all of my material possessions to live a life of abject poverty, or come running to meet my own death, especially if it’s going to be slow and painful. In fact, I am personally inclined to avoid suffering, if at all possible.

Truth be told, I am simply not worthy to be one of Jesus’ disciples. This is certainly the case with me. Frankly, if each of us are honest with ourselves, then each one of us must consider what Jesus has said here, in our text, and come to the same conclusion about ourselves; that we are not worthy to be one of Jesus’ disciples.

The fallen flesh avoids crosses, despises discomfort, and flees to the many pleasures, comforts, and securities that the world has to offer.

The world cannot understand anyone who would devote themselves to a man whose own family didn’t know what to make of him; a man who left his career as a carpenter, to wander around as a travelling preacher, challenging the authorities, and earning for himself such animosity from them, that they had him killed; a man whose only personal possessions at his death, were the clothes that his executioners divided among themselves, as he hung, naked and dying, before them, upon a cross.

Who would be a disciple of that guy? Yet, two thousand and some odd years later, here we are. Not because we are worthy, but because, through Holy Spirit wrought faith, we recognize and confess that we are totally unworthy, and that this man, Jesus, is the Lord.

He is the Christ, our Redeemer, who renounced all that he had, left his heavenly throne, in order to come to us, and make us his own, by means of his own life, suffering and death.

 He counted the cost, and fully and completely paid it for you. He has made peace between you and God the Father. The foundation for our salvation has been laid, and the tower has been completed; it is finished. Jesus Christ is our mighty fortress.

Our gospel text is a strong dose of the law. It confronts us with the fact that, though we were to sacrifice everything that we have, it would not be enough to earn a place in the presence of the Lord.

Jesus Christ has prepared a place for each one of us, where we may dwell with him, forever. All that we can do is believe, and give thanks to him.

Faith in this good news makes you a new creation. Apart from faith in Christ, you are no different from anyone else. But the Spirit of Christ lives in all believers, and so, you are as salt in the world; that something different.

 Your entire life is a witness to a tasteless, mundane world that there is something more than our short lives here, in which every joy, and every suffering, is only for a moment.

 You are a witness to the world of the greater reality of eternity, in which the joy of paradise in heaven, and the terrifying torments of hell, are both eternal.

 You are a witness to the truth that the one, true and living God, through the blood of Jesus Christ, has saved us from hell, and given us heaven, and that faith alone takes hold of it.

Jesus does not call us to hate our families, but to love and cherish and take care of our loved ones. What’s more, the love of Christ moves us to love everyone as Christ loves them.

Yet, for many in the world, being a disciple of Christ means estrangement from their families. In many parts of the world, being a Chirstian can get you killed. The mainstream news sources do not report on the ongoing persecution of Christians.

The murder of Christians just isn’t newsworthy; yet, new martyrs are coined almost daily, meeting violent, untimely deaths at the hands of those who hate them, and the Christ, whose name they bear.

 We remain very fortunate. But even here, in the Land of the Free, we feel the tension increasing, and more and more, the sunny day, holiday season Christians, are leaving the church.

*34“Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? 35It is of no use either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown away. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”*

In Christ, and only in Christ, are we are able to patiently endure the world’s pains and sorrows, and the persecutions that are bound to come with being marked as one of Jesus’ disciples. Not because we are gluttons for punishment, but, because of faith.

When the Holy Spirit, through God’s word, works faith within us, then we are a new creation. Then, our priorities become all skewed; at least, according to the world’s standards.

When we hear of God’s only begotten Son renouncing all that he had, in order to come into our fallen world of suffering, even going to the cross in order to give us forgiveness and eternal life with him, and we believe, then the love of Christ compels us to follow him.

 This is that faith that caused Job to proclaim, in the midst of the loss of his family, his possessions, and even his health; “*Yet, I know that my Redeemer lives, and after my flesh has been thus destroyed, yet with my own eyes I will see Him.”*

This is that faith that caused the prophet Habakkuk to proclaim, even as he witnessed all of the injustice and unfairness of the world around him; *“Yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation.”*

This is that faith that finds us here, on a Sunday morning, to be fed once again with the life giving Word and Sacrament; to hear, once again, the assurance of God’s abundant forgiveness of our sins through Jesus Christ our Lord; to present to Him our prayers, and then, to return to the world out there, bringing with us into any environment in which we find ourselves something different; the hope of greater things, and the love of Christ, for we are flavored with the gospel.

In our gospel text, Jesus proclaims, in no uncertain terms, that nobody is worthy to be his disciple. Our fallen flesh cannot satisfy the law’s demands, nor does it want to.

 When we understand this about ourselves, then we can embrace the good news that Jesus Christ, the sinless One, has made us worthy, by taking upon himself our unworthiness, and giving to us his own righteousness.

Faith in this gospel gives the Christian life its flavor, and makes us as salt in the world; that something different. Dear Christian, remain steadfast in this faith; stay salty. Amen.