

## What Can You Afford?

## A Sermon on Luke 14:25-33

Year C - Pentecost 16

4 - September - 2016

JJ<sup>1</sup>

What are the most important purchases to make in the game of Monopoly? It's Boardwalk and Park Place. If you're the first person to land on those spots, you always hope to have enough money to buy them. If you can't afford them, you hope to buy the next best things, like the railroads and utilities. As you play the game of Monopoly, it's always a question of "What can I afford?" If you can't afford enough, eventually you'll be bled dry of all your money and lose the game.

Today Jesus asks us to consider that question on a scale much larger than a board game. **WHAT CAN YOU AFFORD** when it comes to true spiritual life and eventually eternal life? The asking price Jesus puts on following him as his disciple is steep. It's far more expensive than landing on Boardwalk filled with hotels.

"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple... any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple."

What Jesus says today is shocking, even unthinkable. We wonder how Jesus can

say this. We wonder, "Doesn't God tell us to love everyone?" Yes, he does. In fact, earlier in Luke's Gospel, Jesus tells us to love even our enemies (Lk. 6:27). Jesus isn't throwing the 4th and 5th Commandments out the window. He can't. Those still apply. We are still to respect and obey our parents and any in authority over us and we are still called murderers for just having evil and hateful thoughts against anyone.

So what in the world is Jesus saying? A perfect real-life illustration of what Jesus is talking about is found in Abraham. We begin to see it in our first lesson this morning where Abraham leaves everything he knows to go to a land he's never been to. All because God told him to. Twenty five years later, God gave him the son he promised, Isaac. But then when Isaac was perhaps 10-12, God said, "Take you son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about." (Gen. 22:2) And what do we read in the very next verse? You might expect to hear questions, complaining and excuses like we hear from Moses at the burning bush. But we don't. We simply read: "Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took

---

<sup>1</sup> JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

with him two of his servants and his son Isaac" (Gen. 22:3).

Immediately Abraham goes. Immediately Abraham obeys. He travels three days. He puts Isaac on the altar. He reaches back with the knife to plunge it into his son's heart when God the Son himself calls to Abraham to stop. The test was over.

Could Abraham do this because he didn't love his son Isaac all that much? Of course he loved him! I imagine his love was greater for Isaac than my own love for Asher and your love for your children. He was a true miracle baby. Abraham's eternal salvation and that of the whole world depended on God keeping his promise through Isaac. Abraham loved Isaac dearly, but he loved God more. He loved God first.



What we see in Abraham in Genesis 22 is what Jesus is teaching us today. Jesus uses strong words to show us that the 1st Commandment must always come first. "You shall have no other gods." Our first commitment is to Christ. No one can share that commitment with Christ. There is only room for one at the top.

Abraham, though, didn't always have God at the top. Abraham didn't always love God first. After leaving Ur, we see Abraham stumble along the way. We see Abraham taking matters into his own hands and putting God second. He twice

passed off his wife, Sarah, as his sister. He had a son with Hagar to try and fulfill God's promise because they were impatient.

Every time we see Abraham fail to put God first in his life, we see Abraham bring pain, strife and heartache into his life. You can imagine there were more than strained relationships with Abimelech and Pharaoh when he passed Sarah off as his sister. There were certainly marriage problems that followed. Look at the heartache husband and wife endured when they took God's promise of a son into their own hands. Jealously quickly reared its ugly head between Sarah and Hagar after Ishmael's birth. It got so bad that Abraham sent his son and Hagar away. But they return. Then the grief continues after Isaac is born and Ishmael persecutes Isaac. Abraham has to send his son, Ishmael, and his mother away for good. All this pain, strife and heartache because Abraham and Sarah failed to put God first.

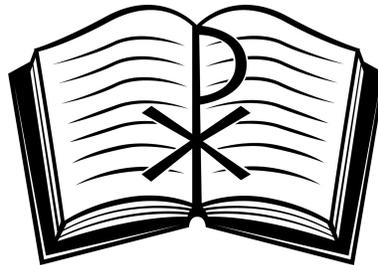
And what about in your own lives? Consider how much of the pain, strife and heartache you have faced within your own family is because you have not loved God first, because your priorities are all out of whack.

Jesus says, "Love me first." But the asking price seems too steep, from a human point of view. At first, Jesus seems like being the first one to land on Boardwalk.

You've hit the jackpot! But then you see the price and it isn't so appealing anymore. Baltic Avenue seems like it will do. It doesn't ask as much. Sometimes we view Jesus the same way. Sometimes we do it intentionally, sometimes we do it out of sinful ignorance, but we put other things and other people first, instead of Jesus.

Friends, **WHAT CAN YOU AFFORD?**

Well, I'll tell you what you can't afford. You can't afford to not follow Jesus. To not follow Jesus not only leaves you in spiritual poverty but will also sentence you to the eternal jail of hell. And there, there is no "Just Visiting" lane. There is no "Get Out of Jail Free" card, like in Monopoly. You could never suffer enough to afford to pay your way out. But there is One who already has.



Jesus Christ, your Savior, the Son of God, paid what **you and I cannot afford!** As the heavenly Father's perfect Son who always loved him first, he gave himself so that his Father would be our Father too! When Jesus' earthly family, Mary included, came to take him away because they thought he was working himself to death and was even a bit crazy, he loved his heavenly Father first, and continued his work. (Mk. 3:21) Jesus carried his cross perfectly his whole life through. He even literally carried his cross to bloody Golgotha and there he sacrificed himself for you. At the very place where the Lord stopped Abraham from carrying out the

sacrifice of Isaac, God the Father did not. There, on that same mountain, God the Father gave up his Son, his only Son. He sacrificed His Son, for you. He was the only one who could afford to pay the price. And the price was the life of his perfect Son, God himself.

Friends, if that is how much God loves you, if that is what God is willing to pay to give you eternal life, would he command one thing that is bad for you? Would he ask you to do one thing to hurt anyone else? No. Not at all.

Jesus says, "Love me more than any of your family members. Love me more than your own life. Love me more than any possession in this world. Be ready and willing to say "goodbye" to any of them in order to pick up your cross and follow me."

Friends, we can't afford to not follow Christ. And we can't do it on our own, so Christ paid the price. We can't afford to not follow Christ because the result is death. So Jesus paid the price to set us free and to give us a love through faith that loves him first.

So, what does that look like in our lives? Well, we could be here all day considering that question. But for now, consider this one thing. With families being torn apart at an alarming rate, we would think we need to love our families more. Well, from one point of view you could say

that's right. But really, it's not. At least, it's not the first thing to do. Jesus says, "Love me first." To stop these messes from happening in the first place, or to bring healing where the damage has already been done, it isn't love of our family members that must grow. It is love for God. That must come first and always be first. Then and only then are we given the tools and love to love our families properly. Then and only then are we able to call to repentance in love and also to repent. And the only way to continue growing in our love for God is to continue to pour his love into our hearts daily through his Word.

Friends, in my studying for this sermon I found a phrase that summarizes much of what Jesus says to us today. "Do not let your happiness depend on something you may lose." (*Concordia Pulpit Resources*, Vol. 26, Part 4, Series C, Pentecost 16) Things break and people disappoint and die. To love them first, even a spouse or child, will not work for your eternal good or theirs. **You can't afford that.** But when you love first the One you can never lose, Christ, then friends, not only will the joy and peace only God can give be yours forever, but you will also find new depths of love for your family. A love you can share with them forever in heaven. That, friends, is worth it. Amen.

SDG<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for "To God Alone Be The Glory". This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn't about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.