

Texts:

- Deuteronomy 30:15-20
- Psalm 1
- Jeremiah 18:1-11 (semicontinuous)
- Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18 (semicontinuous)
- Philemon 1-21
- Luke 14:25-33

Components:

- Sermon notes
- Prayers of intercession
- Annotated hymn suggestions
- Offering prayer
- Blessing & dismissal

Sermon notes on Luke 14:25-33

How does following Jesus transform us? What are we willing to give up? On this day when we pray that we may do God’s work with our hands, these are the questions Jesus pointedly asks us.

In our Gospel, we join a crowd following Jesus, people much like those in our churches who are already committed to walking with him, only to have Jesus look over his shoulder and say some difficult things. Which relationships will we give up, and which ones will we nurture? How will we give away our possessions, our standing, our comfort? The desire to follow is good, but do we understand where he is going and what it costs?

Jesus’ words by themselves sound harsh, and they’re meant to be jarring. Being Christ followers, being church in the world, is not a simple hobby that leaves the rest of our lives as we would order them. Discipleship will disrupt us, personally and communally, in ways that feel like grief and loss even as we are drawn into new relationships with God and neighbor. We are explicitly called away from possessions and money, from relationships that we prioritize over God (see end note), from our lives revolving around ourselves and our own comfort, and into following Jesus, who suffered and who sacrificed all those things for the sake of love. This call to count the cost, on a day when many of our congregations are reuniting for the fall and turning outward to serve neighbors, raises some pointed questions: Who are we going to be as church? What will be our highest good? Who is Jesus leading us toward, and what is Jesus leading us away from? What will this journey cost us, and what new life will God use it to create?

These words are not spoken in a vacuum; they are spoken within the full arc of what it means to be disciples. Hovering at the edges of today’s text are desire and new

life: the desire to be near Jesus that has drawn this crowd (and us) to follow him and the new life he brings us through this path of transformation. Jesus always goes ahead of us. Any suffering or loss, any letting go of pride, greed, comfort, or status that we are called into is something he has already walked through. We are called to the cost of discipleship and its path to the cross, but that same path leads to resurrection. Jesus does not call us to suffering and sacrifice for their own sake but for the sake of justice and mercy and our own need to be reformed as God's people again and again. Abundant life for the whole of creation is always God's gift and aim, and the truth Jesus shares here is that God's vision clashes with business as usual. This may sound harsh, but the simple truth is that we cannot put both ourselves and God first. When we as church offer our work and prayer, we offer ourselves up to transformation, and Jesus knows that, wherever we may be starting, today we are in for a change.

So where is your dear church being led, and how will it transform you? Jesus is and always has been all in, walking toward the cross and from there to resurrection. We who desire to follow will experience this path as both difficult and life-giving transformation, but we will never do so alone.

[An important side note about the Gospel text: Jesus' command to "hate" family is difficult for most people to hear and can easily derail listeners. Many commentators believe Jesus is employing hyperbole here to get our attention, and while the Greek word "miseo" does mean "hate," it also can have a more comparative meaning of "to love less [than something else]." (See Strong's G3404—*miseō*.) Whatever the exact meaning, this is less a command to hate the people we love than a call to radically reprioritize our relationships based on discipleship.]

Prayers of intercession

Gathered together to follow Christ, let us pray for the church, the world, and all of God's creation.

We give you thanks for this crowd of followers the whole world calls church. Guide us as your people on the way, transform our lives and our community to reflect you faithfully, even at cost to ourselves, and continue always to hold us in your love.

God, in your mercy,
Receive our prayer.

We ask your blessing on our work together today as we [*community's act(s) of service*]. Guide our hands and our hearts to live as you lived, and lead us outward to serve the world you love, today and always.

God, in your mercy,
Receive our prayer.

We pray for our neighbors here in [*church's location*], for the people whose homes, schools, and workplaces surround us. May our following of Jesus be a blessing to them, and may we all turn toward each other in service and love.

God, in your mercy,
Receive our prayer.

We intercede with wonder and pleading for the earth that you have made, its beauty and grief, and all its inhabitants. Lead us to love creation as you love it, and show us what possessions we must give up that all your creatures may live.

God, in your mercy,
Receive our prayer.

We ask your mercy on all who suffer in mind, body, or spirit, especially [*names*]. Grant them your peace, turn their sorrow into laughter, and bring them to new wholeness.

God, in your mercy,
Receive our prayer.

We praise you for all the saints who have followed you faithfully and, through your grace, have been brought to eternal life. Comfort all who grieve for their companionship, and grant us all wisdom as we remember the beauty of their lives with us.

God, in your mercy,
Receive our prayer.

We place into your hands all that we pray for and all that we need, trusting in your generous compassion, through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Hymn suggestions

470 “Draw Us in the Spirit’s Tether”

This simple text makes the connections between gathering around Christ, being bound together as disciples within the church, and being sent out to live faithfully in service to all. It appears in the “Holy Communion” section of ELW, but it could also set the tone for the day as a gathering hymn.

658 “O Jesus, Joy of Loving Hearts”

This text, attributed to the 12th-century mystic Bernard of Clairvaux, is set to a well-known melody. It praises Jesus as the one who alone fulfills our longings

when we turn to follow him. The second verse makes it especially appropriate for use during communion.

669 “Rise Up, O Saints of God!”

With its energetic melody, this hymn urges the church to follow Christ in specific and meaningful ways. It could be used as the hymn of the day but would also make an inspirational sending hymn, leading us out to serve.

708 “Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us With Your Love”

Set to a lilting Ghanaian folk tune, this text makes clear connections between following Jesus and loving our neighbors. It could work well during communion or as a sending hymn, bridging worship with service.

720 “We Are Called”

The energy and soaring melody make this a good choice for a gathering hymn, while the text speaks of our joy in being called to follow Jesus and the service to others into which he leads us.

729 “The Church of Christ, in Every Age”

The strong text reflects on who we are as church and how we are called to follow Christ. It is paired with an easily sung setting from the 18th century and could make an excellent hymn of the day.

768 “Lead Me, Guide Me”

This well-known hymn expresses our desire to follow Jesus because we can rely on his grace and care. Both the words and the music were written by Doris Akers, an African American gospel composer and renowned vocalist.

801 “Change My Heart, O God”

In essence this hymn is a brief prayer asking to be formed as God would make us. It is especially appropriate if you are using the semicontinuous reading from Jeremiah on the potter’s house, but it also speaks to the day’s broader theme of discipleship.

Offering prayer

Loving God, receive these gifts of our hands and with them our lives and the life of your church. Transform us in service to you and all you have made, and draw us always near to you through Jesus Christ, who leads us to new life, **Amen.**

Blessing and sending

May God our Creator transform your work and your lives through grace,
May Jesus lead us, his church, to follow in his path of love and sacrifice,
May the Holy Spirit keep you ever joyful and humble in service,
May almighty God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—bless you now and always.
Amen.

Go in peace, and follow where Jesus leads.

Thanks be to God.