

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Pentecost 13
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Sermon by Pastor Jon D. Buchholz
Welcome to your new life!

—Luke 14:25-35

A guy is sitting on a park bench, mad at everything and everyone and frustrated with life. “I hate my life!” he says. “God, I wish you would give me a new life!”

Just then another fellow walks up to the park bench and sits down. “Who are you?” the first man asks?

“Jesus,” the new arrival replies. “My name is Jesus of Nazareth. I can give you a new life, a great new life of joy and fulfillment and peace. But it’s going to cost you. How much are you willing to pay?”

The guy thinks about it for a little bit, and he says, “That new life you have to offer sounds pretty good, but all I’ve got is \$20 in my wallet.”

Jesus says, “Very well, then. The cost of your new life will be \$20.”

“Wait,” the guy says, “if I fork over the whole \$20, then I won’t have any money left for gas. What am I supposed to do then?”

Jesus says, “Gas? You didn’t say anything about a car. In that case, the cost of your new life will be \$20 plus your car.”

“Hold on!” the guy says. “If you take my car, then how am I supposed to get to work?”

Jesus says, “Work? You didn’t mention you have a job. In that case, the cost of your new life will be your \$20 plus your car plus your job.”

The guy says, “Wait a minute! If I don’t have a job, how am I supposed to pay my mortgage?”

Jesus replies, “Mortgage? That means you must have a house. That raises the cost a little more. Your new life will cost you \$20 plus your car plus your job plus your house.”

Now the guy is starting to get really anxious. He says, “But I need a house. My wife and my kids need a roof over their heads! Where are we supposed to live?”

“Wife? Children?” replies Jesus. “Let’s add them to the cost: \$20 plus car plus job plus house plus your family. Is there anything else you’d like to tell me about?”

The guy shakes his head in silence. He zips his lip because he’s afraid to say anything else.

So Jesus continues, “Here’s the deal: That \$20—I’m going to let you hold onto it for me. But I want you to remember that it’s *my* \$20, and when you spend it, you spend it like it’s *my* \$20. And I’m going to let you keep on driving the car, but you will drive it like it’s *my* car—because it *is* my car. And you can keep on working, but when you go to do the job, you will work at the job like you’re working for me—because you *are* working for me. And the house you live in, you’re going to live in it just like it’s the house of God, and the things you do and say there are things you would do in the house of God—because it really is my house, along with everything in it, and I’m going to live there with you. And the wife and children, you’re going to live with them under the same roof, and you’re going to serve them and love them just as if you’re serving and loving me, because they belong to me. Do you understand how this is going to work?”

The guy nods his head. He’s too scared to speak, so he just nods.

“Alright then,” says Jesus. “Welcome to your new life!”

Today, in our “Wounds that Heal” series, we’re challenged with more hard-hitting words from Jesus, and these are perhaps the most provocative of all: *“If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple.”* ²⁷ And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” What is Jesus talking about?

First of all, let me assure you that Jesus does not want you to hate people. The same Lord who says, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” doesn’t turn around and in a moment of fickle indecision tell you to hate those closest to you. God doesn’t speak out of both sides of his mouth. So what’s going on? It’s very simple: this is another example of Jesus using very strong language to wake people up, get our attention, and drive home an important

point. And when Jesus says these things, he definitely has people's attention! His words are shocking. And now that Jesus has jarred his audience out of complacency, he can proceed with an important lesson. It's like in his Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus tells his listeners, "And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell" (Matthew 5:30). Again, the Lord who gave you your body doesn't want you to mutilate your body, so what's the point? The point is that sin is so serious that you don't let anything draw you into it, and you do everything to avoid it, even at the expense of a prized body part. And what's Jesus' point today? There is nothing more important than a relationship with the Son of God, Jesus Christ! Not family, not loved ones, not spouses, not parents, not things, not even life itself is more important than being Jesus' disciple. And if Jesus has to speak in the strongest terms to wake us up and to drive that point home, then he will do it. Does he have our attention now?

There's a reason the Lord says these things when he does. The clue is in the very first verse: *Large crowds were traveling with Jesus*. At first this seems like a great thing. Jesus is the most popular rabbi in the country. That's good, right? Not entirely. The large crowds were making it difficult for Jesus to spend quiet time teaching his disciples and time in prayer. They were making it difficult for Jesus to move around freely and get to the places where he needed to be. And it wasn't like the whole crowd was "all in" on Jesus. There were people who were just along for the fun. They wanted to see miracles. They wanted their bellies filled. They wanted to be able to say, "Yes, I know Jesus. I was part of Jesus' entourage when he came up from Galilee." People were curious about Jesus, but they weren't trusting him and following him. So, while Jesus loves all people, he wanted more than hangers-on and spectators. The big size of the crowd wasn't important. Jesus wasn't looking to be a "megachurch," surrounded by a crowd of people with loose attachment and little commitment. It wasn't about the number of people but their hearts. So he turns to the crowd with an urgent wake-up call, "You want to be my disciple? It's going to cost you. Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me." Detach yourself from the things and relationships of the world, and be attached to me.

Being Jesus' disciple doesn't mean knowing some interesting facts about Jesus. It doesn't mean winning at Bible trivia. It's not some incidental connection. Think of how silly it would be if I were to ask, "Are you a disciple of Jesus Christ?" and the response was, "Of course I am! I drive right past Emmanuel Lutheran Church every day on Southern Ave." Or, "Of course I'm Jesus' disciple! I drop my kids off every day at Emmanuel Lutheran School." Or, "Of course I'm Jesus' disciple! I've been church every Christmas and Easter for the last 40 years." Or, "Of course I'm Jesus' disciple! I attended fish fries and Fall Festival and pancake breakfasts." Or, "Of course I'm Jesus' disciple! I preached sermons and was in the ministry for 35 years." If I tried to convince you that any of these things is the measure of a true disciple of Jesus, you'd quickly see how silly this is. "Of course I'm Jesus' disciple! I was confirmed back in the day! I graduated from Arizona Lutheran Academy!" But we can see right through the claim, and if it's obvious even to us, certainly God can see through it as well.

Picture this: You drove into church today, and instead of driving onto a freshly paved parking lot and a beautiful, finished Ministry and Education Center, you drove onto a torn-up, dirt parking lot, a fenced-off construction area, with rebar and structural steel pointing up toward the sky. It's been four years that we've working on our new Ministry Center, but we ran out of money, and we couldn't finish the project. That would be embarrassing! All around town people would be talking about how foolish we were to start something we couldn't finish. Or let's say one country invades another country and thinks that within a week they can steamroll through and capture the land. But instead, three years later, the invader finds himself locked in a grinding, brutal, senseless struggle that has cost hundreds of thousands of young lives, and very little has been gained. The whole world is going to be chattering about what a foolish mistake it was. The point Jesus is making to the crowds today: Before you get yourself into something, consider the cost. Don't do it halfway. Don't start something you can't finish!

Jesus calls to the crowds, and he calls to you and to me: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Be my disciple, whatever the cost, take up your cross, and follow me." He says, "I give you a new life, a life of joy and fulfillment and peace. Your sins are forgiven, heaven is yours. Jesus gives you the new life that he bought for you with his own blood. Remember, this is Jesus' trip to Jerusalem where he will lay down his life for the sin of the world. Earlier, in Luke chapter 9, at the start of Jesus' trip, Luke tells us that Jesus was determined to go to Jerusalem. Jesus knew the cost, and he was willing to pay it. With unwavering resolve he was determined to see his Father's plan of salvation through to completion. It cost Jesus everything—his life, his blood, the price of redemption. It cost him everything, so that it costs us nothing. It costs us nothing, so that with thankful hearts we gladly, willingly yield to him everything.

Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee;
take my moments and my days, let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold;
take my intellect and use every power as thou shalt choose.

Take my love, my Lord, I pour at thy feet its treasure store;
take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for thee.

Welcome to your new life in Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen.