

## SERMON- Proper 18 (C)

Charles R. Cowherd

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Psalms 1

Philemon 1-21

St. Timothy's (Herndon)

September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Luke 14:25-33

### OPENING:

This is how Garrison Keillor would famously end his “News from Lake Wobegon” stories:

*Welcome to Lake Wobegon,  
where all the women are strong,  
all the men are good-looking,  
and all the children are above average.*

(He could have been talking about Herndon and St. Timothy's!)

This is how Garrison Keillor once responded to our difficult Gospel passage.

*The Christian faith sets some very high standards.*

*Jesus said, “Ye cannot be my disciples unless you give up all you possess,”  
which is disturbing to me as a homeowner with an IRA and a closet full of clothes.*

(Keiler continues):

*Th(ose) guys sleeping on cardboard in the bus depot —*

*Did they used to go out to French restaurants and then to a musical with a big  
dance number, actors with hands over their heads, singing about a beautiful  
tomorrow, (but then) one Sunday morning th(is) verse from the Gospel of St. Luke  
hit them on the head and they gave up materialism?*

*Are they former Episcopalians who gave up their apartments for discipleship?*

*And what did their wives say? Renouncing materialism is not an individual  
decision: others are involved. Was St. Luke married?<sup>1</sup>*

There is so much here, including that old line:

“People like Jesus until he starts to do things they don't like.”

Here Jesus is saying some things that we don't like:

“hating” our father and mother...

“giving up our possessions”

with a remarkably high percentage of negative language:

“No... not... none.” One in almost every verse. Sometimes more than one.<sup>2</sup>

... all in the midst of some of Jesus' ‘mid-grade’ parables about towers and kings.

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<sup>1</sup> [Blame it on the internet, why not? | Garrison Keillor](#) (I rearranged some of his wording for clarity and emphasis.)

<sup>2</sup> Rodney S. Sadler, Jr. “Exegetical Perspective” (Luke 14:25-33) in Bartlett, David Lyon, and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds. 2011. *Feasting on the Word. Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary.* (Year C, Vol, 4) Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 49.

## GOSPEL

So I am going to say something that might seem strange next:

I wish that today, with this lesson, we were having a baptism.

We have been having a lot of baptisms lately and sometimes you might enjoy watching me do some gymnastics trying to connect what Jesus is saying that week to the rite of Baptism.

You might wonder how I would do so here.

It's actually easy because our Baptismal vows also has strong language, firm promises.

Likewise, in this passage, you get the “the full Monty”... “skinny”... you get Jesus’ “marching orders.”

You get the unalloyed truth about what this thing called discipleship is all about.

What the costs of following Jesus are. It's not pretty, it's not easy, but it's clear.

Someone once wrote that what Jesus says here is like the “fine print” on an agreement, on a contract, that you are about to enter into.<sup>3</sup>

The difference, though, between this and, say, a Credit Card Agreement, which is printed in such tiny script that we ignore it...

or in a “End-User License Agreement”, which we hurriedly click through online because we don't understand it...

is that Jesus tells it to us straight.<sup>4</sup>

Those agreements are delivered in such a way that they convince that you don't have to give up *anything* to get this line of credit or this new App or whatever.

Jesus, on the other hand, says: ‘here's the fine print, and you have to give up everything.’”

Following me... it's not all cotton candy and lollipops.

Far from it... in fact... You are going to die.

But by dying you are going to live.

I *could* tell you that linguistically or semantically or rhetorically that Jesus does not really mean what he is saying. That this text is an example of “hyperbole for effect.” That it's a “prophetic exaggeration” to prove his point.

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<sup>3</sup> Ronald P. Byars. “Homiletical Perspective” (Luke 14:25-33) in Bartlett, David Lyon, and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds. 2011. *Feasting on the Word. Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary.* (Year C, Vol. 4) Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 47.

<sup>4</sup> “Pentecost 13 (C): You Can Get With This” (September 2, 2025) *Same ol' Song* Podcast. [Same Old Song: Pentecost 13 \(C\): You Can Get With This](#)

I could tell you: your family is more important than your relationship with God, or your job is important than your relationship with God. But that's not Jesus talking. That's me talking. That's the mealy mouthed Church saying you don't have to, actually, believe or attend, or give, or teach.

I am not Jesus, I don't want to give you the 'Full Monty.' Maybe I worry that we would have a very Smaller church, maybe only about 12 of us,  
And we would be going off to die somewhere

## EXAMPLES:

Perhaps, then, it might be helpful to think of ways that this stringent, seemingly unattainable, model of discipleship is, in fact, realized/ actualized in our own world.

1) First, I think of the late Paul Farmer, the famous public health official/ doctor/ humanitarian, who dedicated his life to helping the impoverished in Haiti and Rwanda and elsewhere. People would come up and ask him, after he got famous, how they could help, where they could volunteer. He would tell them... if you want to help in the hospitals and clinics that he had set up in 3<sup>rd</sup> World countries, if you want to sign up to join him... DON'T.

Remain at home.

Unless you are willing to stay. He called it a "theology of accompaniment." That you need to walk with people, to journey with them, to follow them all the way to Jerusalem, to be willing to suffer and carry a cross. If not...

The French is *accompagneur* which I think could translate to "discipleship."<sup>5</sup>

2) Second, I think of the common scenario in an Alcoholic Anonymous meeting; this common dynamic, I have been told, where someone who is looking to join the group, who wants to get sober, to get clean.... kinda.

They show up, they sit at the back, maybe make jokes to the other newbies about the coffee, they stick together, out of solidarity, with those on the periphery, they are curious but not committed.

The lifers in the AA group, the grizzled sponsors who by the grace of God have been sober for decades and drinking that awful coffee for as long, they say to *those* souls: "You are not ready. You cannot join this meeting. You need to leave. Come back when you are ready to sign up for good, when you have counted the cost."

Because, in the language of AA: until your addiction has finally left you so such that there is no other way, you are not ready.

or in the language of Christianity until you have died to your sin, until the cross that

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<sup>5</sup>Paul Farmer (May 25, 2011) "Accompaniment as Policy" (Speech) *Science of Implementation Initiative*. <https://siidata.org/paul-farmer-accompaniment-as-policy/>.

you bear has crushed you, you are not ready. You should stay at home.

## CONCLUSION

It's so dramatic in those cases.

Our bourgeois existence, thank the Lord, has made these kinds of scenarios a lot less common. Or so we think. They are oh so real even in 2025.

Who among us has not admitted to themselves at some point in their lives...

If I don't quit this job,

Or I don't sever this poisonous relationship,

Or I don't give up this thing which I thought was an important part of my identity but which is actually killing me.

(Follow me here): When we are scared, we think the reverse is true:

We think: I am going to die if I quit this job.

I am going to die if I get that divorce.

I could never quit smoking, quit drinking, quit gambling. That would kill me.

Jesus is there, in those scenarios, telling us the truth.

Saying this is the path to freedom, this is what will liberate you.

We insert the judgement from Jesus. That's our own unworthiness talking. We are unworthy. Jesus is okay with it, he is just describing reality in our passage.

Those things don't define you, those are not your identity. You are free because of me.

Jesus is there for us, when we are ready and we are not...

When we are ready to sign up and we are woefully unprepared.

Again about Paul Farmer:

"I was drawn to the man himself. He worked extraordinary hours. In fact, I don't think he sleeps more than an hour or two most nights. Here was a person who seemed to be practicing more than he preached, who seemed to be living, as nearly as any human being can, without hypocrisy. A challenging person, the kind of person whose example can irritate you by making you feel you've never done anything as important, and yet, in his presence, those kinds of feelings tended to vanish. In the past, when I'd imagined a person with credentials like his, I'd imagined someone dour and self-righteous, but he was very friendly and irreverent,

and quite funny. He seemed like someone I'd like to know..."<sup>6</sup>  
Does that not sound like Jesus??

I talked earlier about this being a baptism sermon, so I thought I would end there:  
"We all share in both water and in cross, baptism and resurrection.  
At the font, we rehearse our vocation. The community is called to inhabit that  
vocation, and model it for the young. Journey starts here, hard choices will be  
shaped by the waters where Christ claims us."<sup>7</sup>

**AMEN**

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<sup>6</sup> "A Conversation with Tracy Kidder, author of *Mountain Beyond Mountains*" (July 24, 2009) *Book Browse*.  
[https://www.bookbrowse.com/author\\_interviews/full/index.cfm/author\\_number/940/tracy-kidder](https://www.bookbrowse.com/author_interviews/full/index.cfm/author_number/940/tracy-kidder)

<sup>7</sup> Byars, 47.