

HOMILY: 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C  
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There are two short stories in Luke's Gospel today. Both are about sensible planning. The first one is about deciding to build a house. You sit down look at plans, available finance and other factors before you begin the project. You will look a bit of a fool if you start on the foundations and run out of money. The neighbours will be quick to have a laugh.

The second repeats the message but for a community or nation. If a country decides to go to war the leaders will have to sit down and consider the cost. Maybe a better solution will be to work for peace.

These planning discussions seem to be at odds with Jesus' general message but we know the stories were to be instructive for the community so what do we hear in these stories today.

The key lies in the introductory sentence. The language is very tough. Discipleship means God's work first and all other attachments second. Not everyone will be happy with this but it explains why there are few disciples. In Jesus' time as in our own there are always people ready to follow the new; ideas, fashions even religions. Anyone can stand up and declare themselves for Jesus especially in the heat of a religious experience. The kingdom of God is not built on emotion but faithful commitment.

Discipleship costs. Can you pay the price? Jesus is suggesting that discipleship is not something to accept blindly. "Sit down" he says, "Weigh the advantages and disadvantages". Don't say yes until you are reasonably sure.

In contrast to some evangelical movements which believe religion is about numbers, Jesus is saying that he doesn't want reluctant disciples. He doesn't want people who feel trapped in something they don't understand. Jesus proclaimed freedom. His disciples proclaim freedom. We can't do that if we don't feel free.

So what does it cost?

We will have to start by changing some attitudes. Like Jesus we have to expand our narrow view of family and nation. The word family has to include all people. Remember when he got a message to come home Jesus said he was with his family.

Proclaiming a God who has no favourites, will cost. We are threatened by inclusiveness. For many, identity comes from belonging to a special group; of knowing who's in and who's out.

A striking example of this comes in the short letter to Philemon, just twenty five verses.

Paul writes to a friend on behalf of a runaway slave, Onesimus. In the letter Paul does not ask just for the acceptance back into the household for the slave and the remittance of punishment. This alone would be a big ask, but Paul asks Philemon to welcome Onesimus back as his brother.

Such is Paul's confidence in the quality of Philemon's discipleship that he says, "I know you will do more than I ask."