

## “I Just Thought We Were Going Fishing”

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Crosspoint Presbyterian Church ~ 29 August 2010  
Luke 14:25-33

**H**ow would you feel? You were invited to go fishing. You get up way before daybreak. You're all loaded up with gear. But when you get to the lake, there is neither boat nor pier, neither ramp nor dock. Before you can fish, you must first build the boat, construct the dock, dig the ramp yourself.



How would you feel? Like the host had betrayed you ~ tricked you even? Probably pretty much like the disciples were feeling after Jesus spoke the text today:

*“I just thought we were going fishing!? I didn't sign on for this other stuff.”*

Long before this as Luke records, Jesus had called the first disciples together with: ***“Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.”*** Or in the more familiar phrasing from Matthew and Mark: ***“Follow me and I will make you fish for people.”***

Yet later in Luke 14, Jesus begins talking seriously about the high cost of discipleship ~ loss of family, status, possessions, even life itself, to follow Jesus. And undoubtedly the disciples thought something like: *“I thought he said his yoke is easy and his burden light. And now!?”*

**W**hen I was on Presbytery's COM, we were routinely summoned to attempt to resolve conflicts in congregations. Sometimes we were more successful than others ~ often not successful I am sad to say. In one troubled congregation in Dallas, the unfortunate outcome included forcing an associate pastor to resign.

Whether the facts of the case justified this action or not is unimportant for our purposes, since the feelings of despair are the same. I was particularly struck by his words on hearing the action of the congregation's board. In the privacy of the pastor's study and extremely vulnerable, he spoke of his feelings of utter defeat as one might expect. Then unexpectedly waxing philosophical, he dropped all rancor:

*"The ministry is a great calling, but a lousy career."*

That is Biblical; and a clear-eyed insight from the depths of despair. His words reflect well the grave disappointment the disciples must have felt that day: *"I just thought he invited us to go fishing."*

Jesus moves from a warm invitation to living the Way to what price is required for life in the Way. Jesus tells us what discipleship will cost us, and first on the list is *family*.

*"Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple."*

What can Jesus possibly mean by "hating" our own family? What was Jesus thinking? This contravenes the Fifth Commandment. To quote the common phrase: *"Hate is not a family value?"*

But this language is itself deceptive. 'Hate' in English denotes loathing, a strong negative emotional response. In the context of first century Palestine however, 'hate' is a Semitic idiom which means rather: to "turn away from," "detach oneself from," or "free self from undue regard." No implication of violence or loathing at all. Instead the implication is of loving the kingdom far more than family ties.



Jesus is making a link here between the cost of discipleship and "getting our priorities straight:"

*"Seek first the kingdom of God and it righteousness."*

[Matt. 6:33] And Jesus uses terms which cannot be



misunderstood ~ followers of Jesus must give Jesus and the living God the primary place in their lives.

Jesus is explicit ~ One must love God more than family, more than possessions, more than life itself.

Family members sometimes cannot bear the cost of another family member's discipleship. Experience confirms this. I was surprised by a woman who came to speak on cults at my wife's congregation in Northbrook, Illinois. I thought the expert would speak on the Moonies or Scientology or Children of God. She spoke long about losing her daughter to a cult, but was loath to identify it.

Finally on being pressed in private, she named Reba Place Fellowship. I knew that congregation! It was a congregation with which I had worked on occasion. I knew the pastor well from numerous conversations over a cup of tea. It had none of the characteristics usually associated with 'cults.' It was no cult by any objective definition, it wasn't into brainwashing or mass weddings or heresy. It simply tried harder to live up to the ideals of New Testament community life which other churches let slide. The daughter took the faith more seriously than the mother. What this mother called a "cult" was merely a stronger form of Christianity than the one with which she had been raised or was comfortable.

One of the costs of discipleship, one cost of following The Way, is loss of family, no doubt about it.

Then Jesus tells two parables of counting the cost before action~ the first, before building something; the second, before going to war.

Texas produces many larger-than-life characters and the Panhandle seems to produce even more than expected. One when I was growing up was a local legend in Amarillo ~ still is, Stanley Marsh 3.

How many have been to the *Cadillac Ranch*, Cadillac bodies mounted in the field on the West side of Amarillo alongside I-40? Stanley Marsh 3 (as he expects to be called) was the patron



who commissioned those odd works of art. A likable local prankster, he seemed always to be doing eccentric things like that.

In High School he drove his car only in reverse for a time, claiming falsely his forward gears were broken. He placed all kinds of mock road signs around Amarillo and



defended them as art by saying "Art is a legalized form of insanity, and I do it very well." One prime example was a road sign which read "Road does not end." Another was "Steal This Sign" which was promptly stolen. Many were merely funny, like the one on the left. He made a billiard table larger than a football field. And so the stories go. Heir to an oil and television

empire, he had plenty of money to play with.

One time a developer set up shop on a parcel of land which Stanley March 3 did not want developed. On his own land right across from the entrance, Stanley March installed a giant sign which read: ***"FUTURE HOME OF THE WORLD'S LARGEST POISONOUS SNAKE RANCH."*** The development failed. Or so the story goes.



Stanley March 3 for all his wealth and business acumen, for all his larger-than-life eccentricities, was nevertheless a tragic figure of classic proportions. For you see the cost of such a sharp wit was apparently a foul temper of equally Herculean proportions. At first quite funny, his mean-spirited nature became progressively more dominant as he aged.

At the victory celebration of a political opponent, he hired a sound truck to shout out obscenities. He kidnapped and threatened youths who he believed vandalized his signs. He ended up with criminal

charges and civil suits against him. He could shell out ridicule, but he could not take it. He ended up a sad, pathetic figure.

Jesus counsels us to count the cost before building and before going to war. Before Stanley March 3 built these pieces of alternative art, he did not anticipate the cost of criticism and reacted with anger and violence when it came. Before he declared war on an opponent, he failed to assess accurately the cost or consequences of impulsive action.

There is a cost for everything, and we are wise to count the cost ahead of time.

**W**e at Crosspoint aren't building a tower, but we are trying to build a church building. Jesus' advice is for us as well, "Be wise and count the cost before starting."

Many rather naively thought it would be easy to start a congregation. Most all of those "settlers" have fallen away by now, surprised by the impediments which have sprung up along the path. They forgot what Jesus said about putting hand to plow and looking back.

Even the "pioneers" among us who carefully counted the cost beforehand and have stayed committed all the way through despite the problems, we are worn down and wearied by the weeds which are choking the path. Do we give up now that we can peer across the Jordan and see the church building materializing on the site? Certainly not!! Are we going to be daunted by the next call to commitment? Daunted, Yes! but committed, Yes, too! Are we willing to invest in God's kingdom, build a firm foundation and bring it to completion?

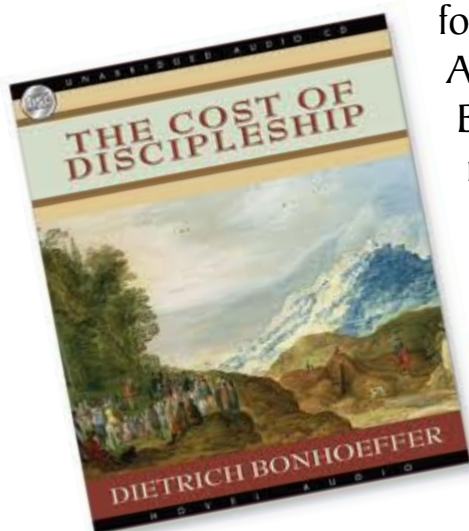
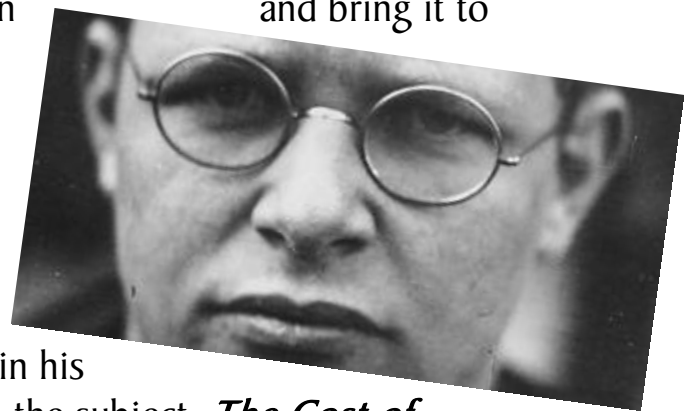
**W**hat is the accurate cost of

following Jesus?

As Dietrich Bonhoeffer has

rightly observed in his

seminal book on the subject, *The Cost of Discipleship*: "When Christ calls a [person], he bids [that person] come and die." That comes straight out of scripture, indeed straight out of



our scripture text today. Bonhoeffer not only wrote this but lived it ~ or rather died it ~ for he was one of those martyred for the faith by Nazi Germany in the last gasps of the war.

The cost of discipleship is the ultimate cost ~ our very lives.

Now each of us at this point is making a quick calculation as to the odds of this *really* happening to us in our current era of toleration and religious freedom. And it is too easy to conclude that the risks are distant while the potential gains are immense. So in our minds we change the topic from actually “giving up” to being “ready” to give up possessions, and family and life without really risking ourselves.

Bonhoeffer includes this attitude under ‘*cheap grace*,’ and points out that for real disciples the real cost is just what Jesus says it will be. Living ‘*costly grace*,’ that is, living lives radicalized by the Gospel will inevitably lead us to risk our lives in actual actions for the sake of the Gospel and to bring to fruition God’s reign.



**A**nd we just thought we were going fishing ~ out for a picnic ~ out for a relaxing time at the lake. A little talk, a little food, a little sunshine. *“Follow me and I will make you fish for people.”* But then Jesus tells us, out at that lake, that following Jesus will cost us forfeiture of all which we possess, along with our family ties, and even our lives themselves ~ a very personal cross to carry.

*“And we just thought he was inviting us to go fishing!?”*

Tough choice: We can be disappointed and fall away like the crowd or we can choose to take up the cross and faithfully follow Jesus.

