

### **Jeremiah 18:1-11, Philemon 1: 1-21, Luke 14: 25-33**

A hen and a pig were great friends. One day they were passing by the church and happened to read the advertised sermon topic, "What can we do to help for the poor?" Immediately the hen suggested to feed them bacon and eggs. The pig thought for a moment and said, "There is only one thing wrong with feeding bacon and eggs to the poor. For you it requires only a contribution., but for me it requires total commitment." That story illustrates a key point emphasised in today's gospel: Count the cost. The cost of discipleship. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, Salvation is free, but discipleship will cost you your life.

A Russian comedian, Yakov Smirmoff talks about when he first moved to America, he was amazed at the variety of instant products he could buy in the store. There's powdered milk: just add water and you have milk. There's powdered orange juice: just add water and you have orange juice. Then he saw Baby Powder and thought, What a great country! If you want a baby, just add water!" Some people think that this is how discipleship works. You take a believer, and add a little baptism water, and you have a fully devoted follower of Jesus – a disciple. But it takes more than water to make a disciple. Disciples are made, not born.

Luke points out that a large crowd is following Him. Jesus' presence could attract a large multitude of people even when He was in rural areas. As Jesus is going along with this large group people, He decides to take advantage of situation and challenges the people about the sacrifices they would have to make in following Him. He wanted them to carefully consider the cost of being one of His disciples. Jesus said, if anyone wants to follow him, he must hate father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, and even his or her own life. Here Jesus doesn't want his followers hate their family, rather he wants them to widen their understanding about family. Jesus wants his followers to move from own family to a family of humankind, and then to the biotic-family – means a family of all living and non-living beings.

In a first century context, to decide for Jesus was considered as deciding against own family. Those who loved own family more would not even consider Jesus. Those who loved their own lives more also would not consider Jesus, since trusting him might eventually mean martyrdom. Jesus wanted his followers that they should understand the cost of discipleship.

The parables stress three main points.

**First**, Jesus is stressing discipleship. It is costly. Discipleship is not an invitation to a parish picnic. It is an invitation to spiritual journey over a long period of time.

**Second**, a disciple of Jesus must think things out very carefully before deciding to follow Jesus and his teachings. Discipleship is not based on sham emotions and shallow enthusiasm. These come and go. But genuine commitment is the basis on which the disciple of Jesus builds. Be ready to endure.

**Third**, a disciple of Jesus must be willing to give up things that obstruct the way to discipleship. The implication that to be a fully devoted disciple of Jesus, we must start, continue and finish.

Jesus used two illustrations to explain about a fully devoted disciple who is able to start, continue and finish. One is of a man who builds a watchtower over his land or over a city. It is understandable that such an undertaking is expensive, and such project is not an easy task. Therefore, it is best to estimate the cost before starting to build. How sad it would be when shortage of money becomes an obstruction to the completion of the project. In spiritual life there have been so many people who have started strong into the faith. They were impacted by the gospel and its believers. They wanted to start a brand-new journey in faith. God gave them that start, but somewhere along the way, they became side-tracked and their spiritual life is pulled over to the side road. So Jesus says, "Finish."

The second parable pictures a king assessing his strength in preparation for war. Jesus points out in the next parable that when a king goes out to wage war against another king; does he not first sit down and consider whether his ten thousand can beat his opponent's twenty thousand? If he realizes he cannot win, he will send a delegation and negotiate peace.

Similarly, says Jesus, those who want to be his disciples must make such an assessment. A person must negotiate peace with God. He or she has two options. **Number one**, one can go one's own way, with the result being taking a stand against God. **Number two**, one can take a wiser approach by suing for terms of peace with God. This second option means giving God his due and then following him. The giving up of "everything" means recognizing that God has claim on all areas of our lives.

Jesus issues a final warning in the picture of salt. Salt is of value and useful as long as it continues to be salty. By showing the image of salt, Jesus wants us to make sacrifices for things of lasting values. Jesus invites us to carry the cross to keep saltiness useful for our fellow beings. Let us look at how Jesus accepted the cross. In a positive way Jesus

accepted the cross, embraced it with his full freedom, and acted with it and on it as much as he could, and used it for the greater good of the world. We all are called to follow Jesus to be his disciples and to carry crosses. God accepts our commitment to his discipleship.

Let us make our own crosses as the wooden platform to gather people together and enlarge our families to take care of all living and non-living beings.

Let us make our own crosses as the wooden ladder to take them up to greater vision and mission and offer saltiness to the world.

Let us make our own crosses as the wooden weapon to fight against the enemies who live and enjoy in injustice, in war, in hatred, in lies.