

Opportunity Costs
Luke 14:25-33
September 4, 2022
First Presbyterian Church, Luling

I am way way way far outside of my area of expertise here, but I looked it up, and it confirmed my memory of high school economics class, so I'm going to venture on. Opportunity costs. It's a concept in economics that describes the value of the next best alternative, which is given up when you make a decision. So, to keep it in the realm of economics, let's say you choose to put your money in stocks, which have a potentially high return, but not guaranteed. When you make that decision, you're giving up the option of putting your money in a CD, which would guarantee a 1% return. That one percent that you're giving up is the opportunity cost.

Or, let's say you decide to take a trip to Hawaii. That means you won't have enough vacation time to take your annual trip to New England to see the leaves changing. The missed trip to New England is the opportunity cost.

That's the economics definition. We all know that there are missed opportunities that cost in terms other than money. The opportunity cost of covid lockdowns has been immense—family visits and relationships, funerals, friendships, jobs. So many losses in order to preserve life. I think we understand the concept, even if we don't use the fancy terminology.

Jesus is talking about counting the costs, and he's including opportunity costs in that calculation. The bottom line for Jesus is that it will cost a person everything, including their very life, to be his follower. People need to know that before they proclaim they're his disciples. This passage makes that quite clear. It starts off shockingly clear, with Jesus saying anyone who doesn't "hate" their father or mother, brother or sister, wife and children, even life itself, can't be his disciple. Hate is a strong word now, and it was a strong word then. Most commentators think that Jesus was exaggerating to make his point, and that may be so. It may be that Jesus meant you can't put anything above following him, including your family. That's still plenty strong, and plenty hard. Your family relationships may be the opportunity cost for following Jesus.

Then he gives two examples, mini-parables really, about counting the cost. The first is that a builder

certainly wouldn't just up and start building without figuring out if he has enough money to pay for the total cost of the tower. Everyone would make fun of the builder when they saw the half-constructed tower. Or a king wouldn't go off to battle if he realized that the other army had twice as many soldiers. He would instead negotiate for peace.

If the builder or the king sat down and counted the whole cost, not just in terms of money, but in terms of lives and reputations, and opportunity costs, then they would enter cautiously, if all, into their initial plans. Nowhere does Jesus say that building the tower is an immoral thing to do. Nowhere does Jesus say entering into battle is an immoral thing to do, much as I might wish he had said that. Just that before committing to something big and important, counting the cost ahead of time is crucial. Know what you're getting yourself into, we might say.

If only it were that easy to count the cost of discipleship. We can't really tally it up in a precise way. That's why Jesus is warning us that it will cost us everything. And if we aren't ready for that, if we aren't ready to take up our cross daily, if we aren't ready to give up all our possessions, if we aren't ready to—as Deuteronomy put it—choose life, then we can't be his disciples. Discipleship has an opportunity cost of everything.

I have a friend who has a baby who is about 18 months old, and she's said I can share about him with you all this morning. His name is Cyrus, but they call him Zippy, and he has red hair and big brown eyes and is adorable. He has a condition called arthrogyryposis, which involves contractures of the joints. In Zippy's case, his elbows, wrists, fingers, hips, knees, ankles, and toe joints are all affected. As you might imagine, the best time for treatment and progress is in the first years of the child's life. And Zippy's mom has worked incredibly hard to find therapies and doctors and surgeries and programs and grants and equipment to help him have a full life. She has a facebook group where she posts about Zippy's progress, and I've followed with interest and prayer. The other day, she posted about how many appointments they had been to, and she later sent me a spreadsheet.

In 2022, as of the end of last week, Zippy has had 191 appointments outside of the house, and 21 appointments at home. That's a total of 212. It works out to an average of 6 appointments per week. His mom is keeping track of the mileage and toll road costs, to track them as medical expenses. That's all quantifiable. But there are opportunity costs for all that, too. There are costs in not being able to let your baby just play and move and learn on their own schedule. Often naps are postponed or missed altogether. Meals get delayed or grabbed

at the most convenient drive through. Zippy has a big sister, too, who misses out on family time and play time. There's a lot more worrying. Or different worrying. Other moms don't understand you, and you need to find friends who do. You're not able to be the parent you thought you would be able to be. But it's not because you're doing something wrong. It's because it costs everything to be the parent you have to be. Love costs everything.

If were even possible to have counted all those costs—monetary and opportunity--in advance, would my friend still want to be Zippy's mom? I'm quite sure the answer is yes.

Like Zippy's parents, like the disciples, we often can't see in advance what the costs will be. Even if we think we know the costs, things don't go as we plan, or end up being harder and more costly than we had imagined.

The disciple Peter heard Jesus's words and knew all this. He had left everything behind to follow Jesus. Jesus warned Peter that he would deny him. And yet, Peter did it anyway. It ended up costing too much to follow Jesus all the way to the cross. But that isn't the end of the story. Jesus forgave Peter, and Peter continued his discipleship.

It's a question we can only answer for ourselves, not for anyone else. What if it costs us everything to follow Jesus? Do we still want to be disciples? If you're hesitating to answer that question, you're not the only one. We don't know and can't foresee all the costs. If we choose life daily and choose love daily and choose discipleship daily, yes it will cost us daily. Love costs us everything and gives us everything. Love never fails.