**A reading from the Gospel of St Luke, chapter 14, beginning to read at verse 25**

**The Cost of Being a Disciple**

**25** Large crowds were traveling with Jesus and turning to them he said:

**26 “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters -- yes, even their own life -- such a person cannot be my disciple. 27 And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.**

**28** “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower.

Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? **29** For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, **30** saying, **‘This person began to build and wasn’t able to finish.’**

**31** “Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king.

Won’t he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand?

**32** If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace.

**33 In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have, cannot be my disciples.**

CHILDREN'S SERMON: Think About It First

Let's talk about pets. A pet can be a wonderful addition to a family. There are many kinds of pets: dogs, cats, horses, goats, birds, rabbits, and fish. Do you have a pet?

There are children who don't have a pet and may want one. Those of you who are pet owners know that animals require care. Before you bring an animal into your home you must think about what is required. You want to be a responsible pet owner.

Every day you must be willing to provide healthy food and fresh drinking water for your pet. You need to see that your animal gets enough exercise.) Some pets need to be brushed and bathed regularly.

Having a pet requires that you be trustworthy - willing to do what is necessary to make sure your pet has what it needs. Be responsible and think about these things - consider the cost.

Jesus talks about responsibility. He says, **"Whoever doesn’t bear his own cross, and come after me, can’t be my disciple"** (14:27). In saying this he means that when you decide to accept God's love and be a follower of Jesus you must think about what is required - consider the cost. You must be willing to do what is necessary to make sure you are putting God first in your life.

Be a responsible Christian - be willing every day to serve God and serve others with God's love.

SERMON:

Some years ago, I attended services in a Big City church.

On the Sunday in question, the vicar introduced a guest preacher. This man had been a successful broker in the city, earning a six-figure income -- a huge income at that time. I’ll have to admit that I found myself wondering how it must feel to have an annual income somewhere north of a hundred thousand pounds.

But the man had felt a call to the ministry. He had felt that he couldn't spend the rest of his life worrying about debentures – so he had quit his job and had gone to theological college. Recently graduated, he had received an appointment to a church in a small country village.

When I heard that story, I was torn. Part of me was glad for this person who had made some genuine sacrifices for Jesus. That's what Christians are supposed to do. I had made that point often in my own preaching. Now, standing before me, was a man who had taken that seriously – had committed his life to Christ in a serious way. He seemed happy about his decision and the course of life on which he was embarked. I was confident that he would be a good vicar.

But there was a part of me that was grieving for what the man had given up.

**He** wasn't grieving.  **He** was happy -- joyful -- looking forward to the life that he had chosen.

Jesus says that sacrifice is an essential part of discipleship. He says:

**"If anyone comes to me,**

**and doesn't hate his own father, mother, wife, children,**

**brothers, and sisters, yes, and his own life too,**

**he can't be my disciple" (v. 26).**

**What is this all about? Do we really have to hate our own families?**

**Here we come across another of the hard sayings of Jesus.**

Is it possible that Jesus wasn't really calling us to hate our family?

The New Testament was written originally in Greek, and the Greek word that is sometimes translated "hate" was *meseo*. *Meseo* has a range of meanings.

It can mean "hate" – or it can mean "disregard" – or it can mean "to be indifferent to."

We also need to understand that people in Jesus' day often used hyperbole to make a point. Hyperbole is exaggerated, dramatic language intended to get our attention – to stop us in our tracks – to cause us to ask, "What did he say?"

So Jesus calls people to *meseo* father and mother -- to hate them -- or to disregard them -- or to be indifferent to them.

Perhaps Jesus meant that we need to put God and Godly things above the most precious things in our lives -- father, mother -- wife, child -- brother, sister. Perhaps we have Godly obligations to all those people, but our first obligation is to God.

Perhaps he was driving home the point that being his disciple is serious business -- that true discipleship means putting Jesus above everything else.

So Jesus says:

**"Whoever doesn't bear his own cross, and come after me,**

**can't be my disciple" (v. 27).**

In Jesus' day, a cross wasn't a lovely piece of jewellery that one wore on a chain around one's neck.

A cross was a cruel instrument of torture. A person who was carrying his cross was on his way to his death.

Then Jesus warns us to count the cost of discipleship. He says:

**"For which of you, desiring to build a tower,**

**doesn't first sit down and count the cost,**

**to see if he has enough to complete it?"** (v. 28).

Perhaps Jesus' point is that we should give some thought to what it means to be a Christian before taking the leap -- because Jesus has high expectations of his disciples.

The book, *Stories for the Soul*, tells the story of Jim Denison, who went on a mission to Malaysia for a summer. While there, he worshiped at a small Malaysian church. One Sunday, he noticed an old suitcase sitting near the wall. When he asked about it, the pastor pointed out a teenage girl who had been baptized that morning.

He said,

**"Her father said that if she was baptized as a Christian**

**she could never go home again.**

**So she brought her luggage."**

**"So she brought her luggage!"** What a price to pay for her decision to follow Jesus! What a commitment!

She gave up her family to become a Christian.

When I read that story, I wondered what had become of that girl. Was she condemned to live on the streets living hand to mouth? Did anyone help her? I hope they did.

When I read that story, I thought, "Perhaps by bringing this girl into that congregation's midst, Christ was testing their faith. He was giving them a chance to do something wonderful for him. I wonder if they were equal to the challenge."

There's a movement abroad today by people who want a very different kind of Christ. This movement is called the Prosperity Gospel. Proponents of the Prosperity Gospel emphasize that Christ wants to make his followers wealthy.

The Prosperity Gospel is a movement that started in the United States and has spread throughout the world. People find it attractive, because it promises material rewards for discipleship. It tells people that following Jesus will make them rich.

But Jesus said:

**"So therefore whoever of you who doesn't renounce all that he has, he can't be my disciple"** (v. 33).

Did Jesus mean that literally? Or is this is another example of hyperbole?

Jesus clearly meant that we cannot be his disciples if we allow the God-space at the centre of our lives to fill up with love of money. Jesus clearly meant that being a Christian involves making sacrifices.

How that works out in our lives might differ from one person to another. There is no standard template. For one city broker, it meant giving up a prestigious job to go to college and serve in village church. For one Malaysian girl, it meant bringing her suitcase to church.

We don't talk about sacrificial discipleship very much today, but Jesus clearly thought sacrifice was important. In fact, in Jesus' mind, sacrifice and discipleship were inseparable.

As the song from the musical "Oklahoma" says, "You can't have one without the other."

You can't be Jesus' disciple without making sacrifices.

So, this morning, let’s leave this service with **three questions**.

I believe that Christ has something important to do with our lives. It might be big, like becoming a missionary -- or it might be teaching a Tygre Club class or helping with the youth group. But I am hoping that these questions will help us to find our calling – and to fulfil it.

So here are the questions:

FIRST QUESTION: **What have I given Jesus lately?**

-- this week?-- This month? -- This year?

SECOND QUESTION: **What COULD I be giving Jesus that I’m not giving?**

* Is Jesus calling us to spend more time strengthening our devotional life?
* Is he calling us to help the hungry and the homeless?
* Is he calling us to work with young people in our church or community?

THIRD QUESTION**: If I were to put Jesus first, how would that change my life?**

**What would I START doing?**

**What would I STOP doing?**

So let’s take those questions home with us today, and ponder them this week:

If the answers to those questions suggest that we should move in a new direction**, let’s trust Jesus** and set out on the journey.

**It may not be easy, but I am confident that it will be blest.**