

This morning our text for meditation is from verses 25-27 from Ch. 14 of the Gospel of Luke, which I read before. Let us hear again these verses ***“Large crowds were travelling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own life--he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”*** Here ends the text for meditation.

“Grace and peace to you from God our Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit who has brought us together”.  
Amen

Dear Friends in Christ:

We all are aware of the terrible war in Syria and Iraq. We have heard of the persecution that Christians are facing by the Islamic in that region. There is a report from Christian Aid Mission about a group of 12 Christians who established nine house churches in the region of Syria. They were brutally murdered by Islamic State militants in a village outside of Aleppo in August for refusing to deny Jesus Christ. The report said that the native missionaries were captured by the Islamic in a village on August 7 and ordered to reconvert back to Islam. They told them to renounce Christ before a crowd of onlookers, but they refused to do so. They all were tortured, beaten and crucified. "Villagers said some were praying in the name of Jesus, others said some were praying the Lord's Prayer, and others said some of them lifted their heads to commend their spirits to Jesus. "They were left on crosses for two days. No one was allowed to remove them." Signs were posted next to their crucified bodies that read "infidels."

Friends, what would you do if you were one of those Christians in Syria? What if you were forced to decide between life and death because of your faith? It really is a difficult decision, isn't it? And, in truth, we cannot really say what we would do until we are actually in that situation. But in many different ways, we face a similar situation each and every day. No one is pointing a gun at us, but there are still times, still situations in which we are faced with a decision, a decision that asks, "how committed are we to the Lord, who was, and is, totally committed to us?"

Jesus tells us what kind of commitment He expects from people with faith in Him as Saviour and Lord. ***“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own life--he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.*** We need to understand the world of the Bible in Jesus's time. There were only two words that people could say: "love" or "hate". And when the Bible speaks about "hate" it means "loving something less." So the cost of discipleship, the cost that comes with following Christ is a 100% commitment of our lives. Following Christ means renouncing all other loyalties in preference to Christ. Following Christ means that nothing—not our family, our wife, our children, not even concern for our own life, should be more important or love more than the Lord, who is truly everything to us.

There is a hymn entitled, "I have Decided to Follow Jesus". The title of this hymn is bad theology, for we know from Scripture that we cannot decide for Jesus or accept Him, for we are by nature, spiritually blind, dead, and enemies of God. The Holy Spirit who calls us by the gospel and opens our hearts and minds to know and believe in Jesus Christ as our Saviour and Lord. As the Spirit makes us alive by faith, we are able to live as dedicated, committed people who know and love the true God.

But we still find ourselves facing decisions day by day that involve our following. This hymn, "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus" was written by a young Hindu prince who was, at one time, forced to make a decision much like that of Syrian Christians who had to decide which was more important: their lives or their faith in God.

In our society, we talk about freedom of religion and tolerance of others, which is important. But not every society has that same tolerance. In many societies such as Muslims and Hindus confessing Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord usually brings about a total change in one's life. Parents would shun children who became Christians; friends would desert

them, employers would fire them. A person could be ostracized by all the people they knew and loved, simply because of the faith they confessed.

The author of the hymn was given an ultimatum: either give up this Christian faith of yours, or be disowned and forgotten by all who knew him. We can well imagine how difficult it would be to make a decision like this. But the hymn is the man's answer to those who would lead him away from the Lord of life. He knew what Jesus had done for him. He knew that Jesus had always been committed to him. Jesus was so committed to this man's needs, and to your needs and my needs of forgiveness and grace, that He was ready and willing to die in our place as payment for the punishment we deserve.

Jesus is so committed to us that He was willing to pay any price for our redemption. Jesus says "**Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down His life for His friends.**" And that is the commitment that so caught the heart of this Indian prince, that made such a difference for Him that the only choice he could make was to live the life of faith to which he had been called, no matter what the circumstances. Like St. Paul, he was determined to know nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified and risen again.

Do we seek to follow the Lord of life and salvation with that same commitment? When a young lawyer asked Jesus, **which is the greatest commandment in the law?** He answered: **Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.** Do we have that "all" for God?

In the crowds that followed Jesus there were people who came, only because they wanted to see Him perform some miracles. And there were those who followed because they wanted to be healed. There were others who were impressed with His teachings and who wanted to know more. It is to these people that Jesus says the words of our text. Jesus is very up-front with those who would come after Him. He is not satisfied with a half-hearted commitment, or with those who follow out of convenience. Jesus wants us to follow Him without looking or turning back. But is that what He gets from us? How often do young people find yourselves having to decide between Christ and your friends? It is not always cool to be a Christian today, especially if following Christ means having to give up doing some of the other things that kids are doing, because we know they are not acceptable to God.

How often have we had to decide between our commitment to Christ and our nice warm bed on a cold winter morning? How often have we had to decide between our commitment to Christ and our relationship with our fellow workers or our social contacts, and yes, even our family?

The Spirit does help us to know the great love of the Lord who has given His very self for us on the cross, who died because of our sinfulness, and rose to give us life forever with Him. And we do want to live in Him. We do want to know the joy of life as His people. But there are those times when other things are more important, when our commitment starts to waiver as we give in to other ideas or when it just seems that the cost of being a disciple is more than we are willing to pay. Jesus is very plain about His expectations: If you want to be my follower, you will have to give Me 100% commitment, not just part-time, but full-time. Do not let anything or anyone get in the way of your relationship with Me.

When our gospel lesson urges us to count the cost, it does seem as if He is asking for so much. But let us not forget that the Lord who does ask for our entire life and being also gives back much, much more. Whatever is given to Him, Jesus assures us will be repaid a hundred-fold.

God is the one who has given us all the blessings we enjoy in this world. He has given us the bodies that serve us; the families we love, the friends we enjoy, the possessions that simplify and enhance our lives. He gives us all this, and then says, "I want you to give me everything you have and everything you are. I want it all to be committed to My use." And when we do this, we find that the Lord takes what we have given to Him, adds to it, and gives us much, much more than before. And, as someone said: you cannot out give God. His commitment to us is total and absolute. The more we respond to His grace with our Spirit-led commitment, the more we see His blessings at work in our lives, too.

Christ is worth our all. We all know the world does not see it that way. They see Jesus as just someone who spoils

their fun, as a nuisance deity who insists that people take time out of their busy lives to worship Him. For many people, the only person we should really be committed to is ourselves, even before our spouse or our children. But what the unbelieving world does not see and realize is how much our Lord has done for us. He committed Himself to us, for the sake of our salvation. He is still committed to our care day by day. He is committed to bringing us the best in life, and the best of all lives in eternity.

So what is that worth to you? May the Holy Spirit guide us to that full and total commitment that brings even greater blessings from the gracious hand of almighty God. Amen.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit forever and ever. Amen