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"Decisions"

Jeremiah 18:1-11 Luke 14:25-35 Philemon 1-21

INTRODUCTION TO JEREMIAH 18:1-11

At God's Command Jeremiah visits a potter's house where he sees some clay resisting being molded into the intended shape by the deft hands of the potter and makes a comparison that still applies to us today.

INTRODUCTION TO LUKE 14:25-35

Philemon had a decision to make. Would he free his slave or keep him. In our passage from Luke, Jesus faces his hearers with a decision to make and to follow up. Would you please stand for the reading of the gospel from Luke 14:25-35

Let us pray. O Lord give us ears to hear. Make us worth our salt. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord our Rock and our Redeemer.

This weekend I went to "THE GAME." I'm not talking about the Game between the formerly #3 ranked Oklahoma and my alma mater the University of Houston which the Coogs won 33 to 23. (Whose House?) My son, also an alum, went to that game.

No I went to THE GAME on Friday night at Stallworth Stadium where the Robert E. Lee Ganders met the Ross Sterling Rangers in the 50th anniversary of the first time they played each other. I went with Ann Reilly and a new friend John "Jan" Lammers, and an estimated 13,997 other folks. Jan is Mike Wilson's next door neighbor who is a fellow Banjo aficionado.

The city went to great lengths to promote "THE GAME". We got there early enough to see part of the 50 year video history of The Game. Another of my friends arranged for 3 Skydivers to land on the field. The 3rd one flew in with a giant USA Flag and landed just as the combined Choirs of the two schools finished the last note of our National Anthem.

At Half time Jan left to go get some drinks and a hot dog. As he left he asked, "How do I get down there?" I said, "You ought to know, you designed it!" On the way to the stadium Jan told us that he was the architect who designed Stallworth Stadium some 46 years ago. His father's firm had sent him to Mexico to look at the stadiums as they were preparing for the 1968 Olympics. He came back with the idea for the design.

They did not start building Stallworth Stadium until Jan submitted the plans and they did a cost estimate to see if they had the funds to complete it. They counted

the cost before they made the decision to move forward. Move forward they did and it still stands some 46 years later.

Sometimes churches go to great lengths to get people to come to their church. They emphasize what's in it for the person they hope to attract not what is asked of them.

Not long ago on a church called the Positive Impact Christian Church offered a door prize of \$1,000. All the local newspapers reported this unusual approach to evangelism. However, the preacher was deeply disappointed when only thirty people showed up when he was anticipating hundreds. After all, he thought, who could resist the appeal of a \$1,000 door prize for a lucky worshiper.

Contrast that experience with a newspaper ad that appeared in London in the 1800s which said, "Men wanted for hazardous journey, small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful, honor and recognition in case of success." "in case of success?" That was the only promise of reward-honor and recognition. Yet, thousands of men lined up to volunteer because the ad was signed by Sir Ernest Shackleton preparing for his sea voyage seeking the Northwest Passage.

Which approach do we take in the church today? Do we make discipleship easy or challenging? Our text today leaves no doubt about the method Jesus took. Instead of giving something away, he demanded that his followers give up everything to make a decision to answer his call to follow him.

Our early astronauts were touted as having "The right stuff." They had the qualities of character, competence, and temperament to do the job they were trained to do. This week when we saw the Space X rocket explode on the Launching Pad we were reminded of the dangers of making the decision to take on the challenge of space flight.

Jesus is certainly talking about having "the right stuff" in this passage. He is telling his hearers what it would take then, and telling us what it takes now, to be his followers. There is no soft sentimentalism in these words of his. He says that the disciple must be prepared to part with family, to endure suffering, to face enormity of the task, and to give up everything for the sake of the Kingdom. Here, compressed in these brief verses, is the delineation of the "right stuff" required of anyone who accepts Jesus' call to follow him. 1)

Jesus said, "So, therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple." Possessions cannot stand between you and the Lord.

He went even further. He said, "If anyone comes after me and does not hate his family—his father and mother and grandmother and daughter and sister cannot be my disciple."

In the Aramaic language that Jesus spoke the word "hate" is not primarily a feeling word. It is primarily a priority word. It means to abandon or to leave aside; the way a sailor has to abandon a sinking ship or the way a general has to leave aside distracting things to win his battle. 2)

Even something as noble as the love of family, as good and right as that is, cannot stand in the way of commitment to the Kingdom of God. Laziness, fear, selfishness, family, nothing is to stand between us and the call to discipleship.

Jesus spoke of the necessity of total commitment. He conveyed this in no uncertain terms when he said to his disciples, "You must take up your cross and follow me." He didn't say "pick out a cross from James Avery." This morning we said, "Must Jesus Bear the Cross Alone? NOT "Must Jesus Wear That Cross Alone?"

Following Jesus is much more than a Sunday morning commitment to attend a service of worship. It is a hungering after God to the point of death if need be. The demands that Jesus makes upon those who would follow him are extreme. It shakes our foundations, topples our priorities, and, if they choose not to follow Jesus with us, pits us against friends and family.

Years ago a man named Millard Fuller was near the apex of an American success story. He was a corporate executive working eight days a week and pulling down close to a million bucks a year. But then one day he heard God calling to him, telling him his life was overfull and his priorities out of whack. So in prayer with his wife one day, Fuller re-committed his life to Christ. He quit his job, moved to a more modest house, and wondered what to do next. What he ended up doing next was building affordable houses for low-income families who could purchase these homes interest-free. Today we are most of us well aware of the great good Habitat for Humanity has done. 3

Today, we house the local offices of Habitat for Humanity on our campus and some of you have taken part in building houses.

Dr. H. King Oehmig tells a story of the time that a church congregation from Cartersville, Georgia wanted to begin a Habitat for Humanity group. It was in the early days of Habitat, so the group went to Americus, Georgia to meet with Millard Fuller. The group toured the Habitat facilities and saw a presentation on how groups operate. Then Mr. Fuller took time from his busy schedule to go and talk to this group. During the course of their conversation, one of the folks from Cartersville said, "Mr. Fuller, we think this is what God's calling us to do. But before we begin, how much money do you think we should have in the bank to get us off the ground?"

Fuller leaned toward the man and in a very low and serious voice told him, "It would be wholly irresponsible, completely negligent, totally feather-brained if you

started an affiliate without at least one dollar. But you have to have one dollar. Don't dare make a move without it!"4)

To follow Jesus we must first establish our priorities and secondly, we must count the cost. Look at how Jesus illustrates this point. Suppose, Jesus says, one of you wants to build a tower over your vineyard so you can keep a lookout for thieves who might want to steal your harvest. Before you build, what is the first thing you will do? Will you not, he says, first sit down and estimate how much it will cost you to build the tower? It is a rhetorical question and the answer is: "Yes! Yes, I will first count the cost." You do not want to appear to be a fool by laying the foundation, running out of money, abandoning the project, and becoming the laughing stock of the community. Don't let it be said of you my friends: He began to build but he was not able to finish.

To follow Jesus we must establish our priorities; we must count the cost and we must PAY the cost. You have to have one dollar. Don't dare make a move without it!"

Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac. Moses left a life of luxury in Pharaoh's court to herd sheep on a mountain. Peter dropped his nets and left his family and his family business to follow Jesus. Matthew gave up the lucrative profession of a tax collector. Paul gave up his prestigious position as a Pharisee.

Andrew died on a cross shaped like an X. Simon Peter was crucified upside down. Bartholomew was flayed alive. James (son of Zebedee) was beheaded. The other James (son of Alphaeus) was beaten to death. Thomas was run through with a lance. Matthias was stoned and then beheaded. Matthew was slain by the sword. Simon was crucified. Thaddeus was shot to death with arrows. Philip was hanged. Judas hanged himself. Only John died of natural causes, but he did so in exile on a small island in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea.

I have often wondered what would have come of the church if Jesus' Disciples had not made those ultimate sacrifices. Where would we be if they had not paid the price of discipleship with their very lives? What kind of church would we be if the 11 had put down their crosses instead of taking them up?? 5

Chiune Sugihara was born on a day of new beginnings January 1, 1900. As a boy, he cherished the dream of becoming the Japanese ambassador to Russia. By the 1930s, he was the ambassador to Lithuania, just a step away from Russia.

One morning, a huge throng of people gathered outside his home. They were Jews who had made their way across treacherous terrain from Poland, desperately seeking his help. They wanted Japanese visas, which would enable them to flee Eastern Europe and the Gestapo.

Three times Sugihara wired Tokyo for permission to provide the visas; three times he was rejected. He had to choose between the fulfillment of his dream as an ambassador and people's lives. He chose the latter. He dared to disobey orders. For twenty eight days he wrote visas by hand, barely sleeping or eating. Recalled to Berlin, he was still writing visas and shoving them through the train windows into the hands of the refugees who ran alongside the train as he was leaving. Ultimately he saved six thousand lives.

Sugihara spent his remaining days in Japan, humbly selling lightbulbs. When his story was finally told, his son was asked, "How did your father feel about his choice?" The young man replied, "My father's life was fulfilled. When God needed him to do the right thing, he was available to do it." 6

Sugihara had the right stuff to do the right thing. He made his decision even though it meant giving up his life- long dream. He had to hate being the Japanese ambassador to Russia in order to save lives and spend the rest of his days selling light bulbs.

Jesus said, "For which of you, intending to build a tower does not first sit down and count the cost to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish all who see it will begin to ridicule him saying, this fellow began to build and was not able to finish."

We are called to not only count the cost but pay it, whether it's to build a house for Habitat, or a Stadium for THE GAME, or a Miracle on Main Street at 3900 North Main. Jesus is looking for disciples who can not only make but also follow through on theirdecisions.

Let us pray. O God of freedom and justice, who alone can break the fetters of bondage which enslave us, we give you thanks that in Jesus we can walk freely as your sons and daughters. While we were slaves to sin, he rescued us. To us who were caught in the trap of self- deception he showed your mercy It is through him that we can approach you in prayer.

Hear us as we offer our petitions and seek your grace to take every step of our faith's journey. As Christ suffered for our sakes, make us willing to bear our own cross. As Christ rose victoriously help us to demonstrate the risen life through acts of liberation from bondage. As Christ welcomes all to dine at your table, prepare us for the day when united we will join with all who have gone before us at your table in heaven.

- 1) If Only... by Wallace H. Kirby
- 2) Counting the Costs by Jerry Ruff
- 3) Comments and Observations by Scott Hoezee
- 4) Do You Believe in Miracles? by John Bedingfield
- 5) John G. Lynch, Troubled Journey, CSS Publishing Company.
- 6) ChristianGlobe Illustrations by King Duncan, adapting Stephen Arterburn, The Power Book