

Questions Jesus Asked:

Would any of you think of building a tower without first sitting down and calculating the cost?

F. In the part of Luke's Gospel (14:25-33) Shagufta read to us, Jesus asked a couple of questions in relation to the cost of being one of his disciples.

C. Why do you think Jesus asked so many questions?

F. That's a good question! From an early age, Jesus was always asking questions. In Luke 2: 46-49 we read about his parents finding him in the temple courts, "sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions." When his mother asked why he'd treated them like this, he replied using two questions: "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"

C. Yes... but why did he ask such questions?

F. Possibly to find out information, although there is an argument for saying because he's God, he already knew everything. It's more likely, he asked questions to encourage people to think for themselves and not just accept what other people believed and taught. Paul was very keen on that; remember "work out your salvation with fear and trembling"? (Phil 2:12)

C. Sounds like a topic for another time... Shall we look at the questions in the passage for today?!

F. Good idea!

C. By the way, did you know that today is St Luke's Feast Day? We know very little about him – nowhere in his gospel does he share any personal information or even claim to be the author. Paul describes one of his companions as "our dear friend Luke, the doctor" (Colossians 4: 14) and so people have assumed he was an educated man. He's also credited with being the author of The Acts of the Apostles, written in Greek, to Theophilus which means 'beloved by God'.

F. Fascinating! Let's get back to the question Jesus asked in Luke 14... "Would any of you think of building a tower without first sitting down and calculating the cost?"

The verses that immediately precede this question contain some of the most challenging and difficult words that are attributed to Jesus. (Luke 14:25-27)

It seems Jesus said to the crowd that was following him that a person could only become his disciple if she or he was willing to HATE the closest members of their family and even his or her own life. Can Jesus have really meant HATE? Doesn't he tell us to love one another?

C. Yes, he calls it a new "command", in John 13:34.

F. Even there Jesus gives us a clue as to what might be required of us one day... He says, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." Ultimately, he was willing to die for us. Put starkly, are we willing to die for one another, if circumstances require it? (Pause)
Do you remember what Maximilian Kolbe did for one of his fellow prisoners in Auschwitz?

C. Was he the priest who volunteered to take the place of a man who had been condemned to death? Wasn't he a Franciscan?

F. That's right. After a prisoner had escaped from Auschwitz, as a way of discouraging others from even attempting to escape, ten men were selected at random, by the Nazis, to be starved to death. Kolbe offered to take the place of one of the men who cried out that he had a wife and children. He laid down his life for his 'brother'.

C. But not many of us will be called to die in that way...

F. Agreed... however, I think the important thing about this "new command" is that, if it's necessary, we would be willing to be obedient. It's even clearer in John 15: 13... "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."
Of course, we know that Jesus was talking about himself – he was willing to die for us, "his friends". The key question for us is: if it's necessary, are we willing to do the same? Looking back at Luke 14, there's an echo of this in verse 33. "...any of you who does not give up everything he (or she) has cannot be my disciple."

C. This is all getting pretty heavy... how do you think friends at PRBC will be coping with it? Perhaps we could think about some of the other things Jesus promised, like "life in all its fullness"?

F. You're joking! You know the theme is 'Questions Jesus Asked' and we chose this one!

C. Okay, let's get on with it then.

F. Most of the passage in Luke 14 is the illustrations Jesus used to help his listeners be aware that it's really important to work out what the cost could be if we decide to become his disciples. Building a tower or going to war... the cost of either activity needs to be calculated carefully.

William Barclay, in his commentary on Luke, writes that an unfinished building is always a humiliating thing, especially if it's built on a hill, like McCaig's Folly, on Battery Hill above Oban. In the same way, nowadays, a couple who are thinking of getting married are encouraged to attend a marriage preparation course. We all know that such an enterprise is "not to be entered upon lightly or unadvisedly, but thoughtfully and reverently". If big decisions like a building project or a marriage need to be approached carefully, how much more care is needed with the decision to become a disciple of Jesus.

C. Do you think people realise what they're 'signing up' for when they choose to become a Christian?

F. Probably not... initially, at least, I think most of us make a decision based on 'What's in it for me?' We may not put it as starkly as that but perhaps that's what it boils down to. Like the man who came into church a few years ago when we were on door duty and asked...

C. "If I join your church, what's in it for me?" I remember him very well!

F. If I may wander away from this passage for a minute or two, perhaps this is where the parable of the sower (Matthew 13) sheds some light on discipleship. Different sowing and growing conditions do affect how well the seed does; some seed will produce a really good crop and some will not do so well. (Pause) We are all 'on a journey' and as we grow in faith and understanding, and allow God to grow more in us, we will become more Christ-like.

Perhaps Jesus used these off-putting words in Luke 14 as a way of 'sifting' the crowds that were travelling with him. If some people were following him because of the miracles they were witnessing; the stories they were hearing and the way he was speaking to their religious leaders... it would bring them up short to hear him talking about hating their family and being willing to give up everything to become one of his disciples.

C. In reality, very few of us will have to choose between loving God and loving our family but we need to weigh up where our priorities will lie if it comes to being forced to make that choice one day. It doesn't have to be either/or; it will be both for most of us.

If you think about people like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Edith Cavell, Martin Luther King & Oscar Romero – they didn't actively choose to die because they were disciples of Jesus, but their commitment to living in a Godly way led to each of them being murdered.

F. Yes, absolutely right... it's the preparedness and willingness to "take up your cross" that matters. Those four almost contemporary Christian martyrs had probably thought it through, knew they were taking risks with their lives and made decisions to go on being disciples of Jesus. (Pause) Thankfully, most of us will never have to face their choices.

C. How would you sum up the key things that emerge from reading Luke 14: 25-33?

F. Three important questions to think about / ask ourselves:

1. Why am I a disciple of Jesus? Is it about what God can do for me; what I can do with God... a bit of both?
2. Have I ever taken time to think about the cost involved? Can I afford to be a disciple of Jesus?
3. If it comes to making a hard choice, am I willing to give up everything to live in a way that pleases God?

Prayer: Please help us, Lord, to understand what you require of us if we desire to live in a way that pleases you. Help us to think through and make the difficult choices that will inevitably come our way, knowing that you love us more than we've ever been loved by family or friends.

Amen