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“How Much? How Many? . . . One.”  
Text: Luke 14:25-35 (Philemon 1-21)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

*Now great crowds accompanied [Jesus] . . .*

That’s good, right? That’s what Jesus wants, isn’t it? All people to know and follow Him.

But in the Gospel today, Jesus turns to them and seems to discourage the crowds. He doesn’t tread softly and encourage them and speak words of comfort to them. Quite the opposite, actually. Tough words. A very high bar compared to what is often the easy, low bar Christianity of our world today. And how do you measure up?

*If you do not hate your family - your father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters - you cannot, you are not able to be my disciple, Jesus says.*

*If you do not hate your own life, you are not able to be my disciple.*

*If you do not bear your own cross, you are not able to be my disciple.*

*If you do not renounce all you have, you are not able to be my disciple.*

Strong words. But not to discourage them, or us. Rather to be realistic. Because Jesus knows what we don’t know, or don’t want to know, or so often forget: that He’s in enemy territory, come to do battle. Battle against the old evil foe, the devil, who’s not going to sit back and do nothing; who’s not going to take this incursion lightly. He’s going to fight. And not just against Jesus, but against you.

If you remember, right after 9-11 - the twelfth anniversary of which we commemorate in just a few days - President Bush came out with what became known as “the Bush Doctrine:” that the United States will pursue and punish terrorists *and those who harbor them*. Well, the devil’s doctrine is much the same: to pursue and seek to destroy Christ *and those who follow Him*.

And, Jesus knows, **he will use your family**. Many have turned away from Jesus in some way, shape, or form because of family. Because they did not want to offend, because they were more afraid of what their family would think than about Jesus.

**He will use your own life** - your sinful human nature and its desires - to turn you away from Jesus, making sin look good and delicious and desireable. Making the truth seem mean and ugly and false doctrine seem good and loving. Playing on your emotions and weaknesses . . .

**He will use persecution and the cross.** Threats of not only harm but of disadvantage at work, in school, in society have caused many to compromise and cave to the sinful ways and will of the world.

In short, **the devil will use anything and everything in this world** to undermine your discipleship. To cause you to turn back and turn away, *maybe*. But often it is more subtle than that. To just make us pause and take a break. Perhaps miss a few Sundays. Fall for a few temptations. Disbelieve just some of the Word. Start thinking that we need to get with the times. But then, like the toddler who stops following Mom in a crowded mall, we soon find ourselves separated from Jesus and, if left on our own, not able to get back.

That's why Jesus' words today, warning us: if you love these things more than Me, if you prefer these things and follow after these things, you are not able to follow Me. You will fall.

And we do fall. If not directly because of sin and temptation and these things I've been talking about, then because we've simply grown battle weary. Our country today, it is said, is battle weary. We're tired of the fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan and now the conversation/debate about getting into the civil war in Syria. Many just want a time of peace and rest.

Well, so too in our lives as Christians. It's hard to keep fighting. It's hard to stay vigilant. We just want a time of peace and rest.

The problem is: the enemy doesn't rest. He thinks he can win this war. The devil believes he can eliminate the church, and looking around in our world today it may look like he is succeeding. The persecution against Christians in many countries, the false doctrine in many churches, the watering down of the truth . . .

But it is not so. The devil cannot win. We have Jesus' promise that *the gates of hell will not prevail against the church* (Matt 16). Without that promise you might as well go home and sleep in on Sunday mornings, and I might as well sit down and shut up because we can't do it. Like with Adam and Eve, the devil is too much for us. Without that promise, we're done.

But **he who has ears to hear, let him hear**. Hear not only this promise but all the good news Jesus has for you. For you who cannot build the church or your own eternal life. For you who do not have the strength or the numbers to stand up against the enemy's forces and power. Hear, so that you live not in fear of the enemy or despair in yourself, but in confidence in your Saviour and boldness against whatever comes your way.

For God, yousee, did count the cost. He calculated what it would take. He knew the price

of victory. And the answer for Him, the answer to *how many, how much* is . . . **one**. His Son.

To build His church . . . **one**. His Son.

The number needed to stand up against the devil and his minions . . . **one**. His Son.

Who took up the cross . . . **one**. His Son.

Who renounced all He has . . . **one**. His Son.

Who loved His Father more than family, more than the things of this world, more than His own life . . . **one**. His Son.

And when that one, hanging bleeding and dying on the cross said *It is finished* (John 19:30), it was. The devil will keep on fighting until the last day, until the very last moment, and casualties will still, sadly, happen. But that third day, when the seal of death and the grave were broken in Jesus' resurrection, the war was over. Victory assured. The gates of hell no match for that one. That one on your side. That one who fights for you.

And so all you need to be His disciple that one puts here for you and *gives* to you. On your own it's not happening. You are not able. But in Jesus and with Him and His victory, you are His disciple. Because He has done it. You are baptized into Christ. You are His, His child, His disciple, because He has declared it to be so. And He will provide all you need to remain so.

And so the life that you need against the deadly poison of the devil? **Given**.

The forgiveness that you need when you fall? **Given**.

The rescue that you need when you fall back and get lost and separated? **Given**.

The love you need when your love gets messed up? **Given**.

The strength that you need in your weakness? **Given**.

All that you need? **Given**.

For His blood *given* and shed **for you** is now *given to you* in His Word and Sacraments. His blood *given* to wash you clean, feed you, strengthen you, keep you, and "Spirit" you with the Spirit of Jesus. The Holy Spirit to make you holy by connecting you with Jesus, and to live in you as your strength against the old evil foe.

So now in Jesus and with His Spirit, you are able. To live a new life. To bear the cross and lay down your life for others in love and forgiveness and so follow Christ. And you do not have to look for these opportunities. They will come to you as the Spirit works in you to conform you to the image of Christ. At school, at work, at home, in your marriage, in your friendships, at church, wherever you are living in the callings you have been given. In the Epistle we heard this morning, both Philemon and Onesimus were given that opportunity to live a new life. Onesimus, the runaway slave, by going back to his place, and Philemon, his master, by taking him back, or releasing him, and forgiving.

How often do we have those same kinds of opportunities? To go back? To forgive? It will

never be easy to do those things, and you'll fall. Sometimes hard and spectacularly! Sometimes because you're stubborn, sometimes because you're weak, sometimes because you're afraid, and for lots of other reasons. It will never be easy to follow Christ. The devil will make sure of that.

But when you fall, here's the key: . . . And if you only remember one thing from the sermon today, remember this: . . . When you fall, *don't* turn back to your own strength or resolve to do better! You've tried that before, so have I, and it doesn't work. Not for the long haul. Not for the battle. We're not able.

Rather, when you fall, go back to **the one** - the one who is able. Confess your sin, your failure. Repent. And given ears to hear, hear again those words you need to hear; those words that will give you strength and hope and all you need. ***He who has ears to hear, let him hear: You are baptized. You are mine. I forgive you all your sins. Take and eat, take and drink. Depart in peace.*** And these - and that **one** who speaks them - will make the difference in your life.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.