Sermon Series: The Four Building Blocks of Our Faith
Sermon Title: The Calling of a Disciple

Text: **Luke 14:25-33 -- Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, 26 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. 27 Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. 28 For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? 29 Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, 30 saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' 31 Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? 32 And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. 33 So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.**

Opening: An **oxymoron** (*in Greek it means a sharp fool*) is a two-word phrase containing contradictory elements. Here are a few you might have heard … (1) **good grief**, (2) **jumbo shrimp**, (3) **small crowd**, (4) **a numb feeling**, (5) **working vacation**, (6) **clearly misunderstood**, (7) **metal woods**, (8) **an unbiased opinion**, (9) **controlled chaos**, (10) **deafening silence**. There are also oxymorons in the form of questions like: (1) **Why is the third hand on the watch called the second hand?**; (2) **Why do "fat chance" and "slim chance" mean the same thing?**; (3) **Why do "tug" boats "push" their barges?**; (4) **Why do we sing "Take me out to the ball game" when we are already there?**; (5) **Why is the word "phonics" not spelled the way it sounds?**; (6) **Why do we put suits in garment bags and garments in a suitcase**? This morning, I want to add ***ONE MORE OXYMORON*** to our vocabulary this morning. It is the phrase **lukewarm Christian**. Like all the others, these are two words that just don't go together. Perhaps you remember where the phrase comes from. In **Revelation 3:16**, God said to the church in Laodicea, "...**because you are lukewarm -- neither hot nor cold – I will spit you out of my mouth." For a little context regarding this verse … cold water was useful for drinking and hot water served medicinal purposes, but lukewarm water was good for nothing**. The point is that describing a believer as lukewarm is simply contrary to what a follower of Christ should be. It marks the person who claims to be a Christian, yet isn't growing closer to our Lord or becoming more useful to His kingdom.

We're now in the fourth message in our series, "**The Four Building Blocks of Our Faith**." We identified these as … WORSHIP, GROW, SERVE AND SHARE. The first three messages focused on the WORSHIP aspect of our faith. Hopefully, you now understand WHY worship is so important. Now we're going to look at the GROW part of our faith.

You may or may not know that a disciple is someone who follows and learns from another. All Christians are in one sense disciples in that we have a personal relationship with Christ. **Because Jesus is now seated at the right hand of the Father, we cannot be discipled by Him in the same way that the twelve were. Today, we understand discipleship to involve a series of relationships that ultimately can be traced all the way back to Christ. WE FOLLOW A BELIEVER WHO HAS FORMERLY WALKED IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ANOTHER BELIEVER WHO HAS DONE THE SAME AND SO FORTH AND SO FORTH.** This is what the Apostle Paul was describing in **1 Corinthians 11:1 – Be imitators of me as I am of Christ**. **All of us are to be engaged in a process whereby we are being trained (*like an athlete or soldier*) by a seasoned veteran in the Christian faith for a lifetime of effective ministry in the Lord's service. For me, this chain of relationships began with my first pastor, a man named Alan Brindisi who handed me off to Larry Wakefield who handed me off to Brad Eakins who passed me on to Zeke Zeiler. Then Dr. George Sweeting took over.** Though only two of these men actually knew each other, they were all used by God to train me in the Christian faith. I shudder to think of where I'd be if the Lord had not placed these men in my life. From them, I learned what the Bible taught about being a Christ-follower.

This vision of discipleship is the key to the spiritual growth of every one of us. It's not that we can't grow in the absence of other more mature believers, but it sure is a lot harder. Here at River Ridge, we want to create a culture of discipleship that will affect both the ***spiritual depth and breadth*** of everyone in our church. To the degree that we succeed, we will become infectious (*and I mean that in a good way*) toward one another and those outside the church as our lives are changed and God is glorified. But this begs the question: What has to happen for us to become this kind of church? Where does it all begin?

Keep your Bibles open to **Luke 14:25-33**. **In this passage, Jesus, having attracted a crowd, sets out to deliberately check their wild and unthinking enthusiasm** (after all … **zeal without knowledge is not good – Proverbs 19:2**) **by talking about the cost of following Him**. Why you might be wondering would He do such a thing at the height of His popularity? You'd think Jesus would want as many people as possible on His bandwagon. THAT DOESN'T SEEM TO BE THE WAY HE OPERATED. Our Lord wasn't looking for followers who were merely hyped up on emotion, but who were GROWING as disciples. And so, He issues His call to discipleship by first talking about the cost to everyone who would choose to follow Him.

Permit me to say one thing before we begin. **Some people teach that the CHOICE to believe in Christ as Savior and Lord and the CHOICE to follow Christ as His disciple are two separate and distinct decisions**. They would, therefore, interpret this passage, not in terms of what it means to be a part of God's family, but what it means to follow Christ once you've become a part of His family. This view, however, is wrong. Luke, who is the author of both this gospel and the book of Acts, uses the word '***disciple***' to refer to anyone who believes in Christ (**Acts 6:7 – So the Word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly; 11:26 – The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch**). It's clear that in Luke's mind to ***be a believer is to be a disciple*** of Christ. With this in mind, In **Luke 14** Jesus provides us with a description of the kind of commitment He is looking for in His followers.

A Disciple puts Christ before ANYONE (**Luke 14:26 – If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters**, (**yes even his own life – we'll return to this part in a moment**), **he cannot be my disciple**.) Here Christ is not teaching us to hate others. How could He possibly tell us to hate our parents when one of **the 10 commandments** is to honor our mothers and fathers? This is called ***the language of exaggerated contrast***. We find an example of it in **Genesis 29:30-31**. **Verse 31** says that **Leah was hated by Jacob**. **The preceding verse** softens it a bit however when it says ... Jacob loved Rachel ***more*** than Leah. **Just as the writer of Genesis was contrasting Jacob's affection for Leah with his *utter devotion* to Rachel, so here in Luke 14 the Lord is contrasting our utter devotion to him with the love and affection we share for others … who were never meant to occupy the primary place of affection in our hearts**. **Asaph**, one of King David's three chief musicians, says it this way in **Psalm 73:25 – Whom have I in heaven but you, and there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you**. In the grand scheme of things from God's perspective, He is to take first place in our lives above all others, including anyone in our immediate families – father/mother/wife/children/brothers/sisters.

Let's take a moment to ask ourselves if we love the Lord more than anyone else? As I ponder my answer, I think of my kids and the same question they used to ask me, I think because of my role as a pastor. They would ask who I love the most. I understood what they were getting at. They wanted to be assured of my affection no matter what. So, here's what I would say, "***I love you with all my heart, but I follow Jesus. He's my God and my King***." I cannot help but think that any true disciple of Christ would have to nod his head in agreement. Jesus comes first before all others.

In February 2001, **John Oros** spoke to an audience at the **Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary** about his experience as a church leader in Romania during the Communist era: During communism, many of us preached and people came at the end of a service, and they said, "I ***have decided to become a Christian***." We

told them, "***It is good that you want to become a Christian, but we would like to tell you that there is a price to be paid. Why don't you reconsider what you want to do, because many things can happen to you? You can lose, and you can lose big***." A high percentage of these people chose to take part in a three-month catechism class. At the end of this period, many participants declared their desire to be baptized. Typically, I would respond, "***It is really nice that you want to become a Christian, but when you give your testimony there will be informers here who will jot down your name. Tomorrow the problems will start. Count the cost. Christianity is not easy. It's not cheap. You can be demoted. You can lose your job. You can lose your friends. You can lose your neighbors. You can lose your kids who are climbing the social ladder. You can lose even your life***." Let me tell you my joy when we looked into their eyes, and their eyes were in tears, and they told us, "***If I lose everything but my personal relationship with my Lord Jesus Christ, it is still worth it***." That's the kind of people that Christ is enlisting to be His disciples. (**Review**: **A disciple puts Christ before anyone else**.)

A Disciple puts Christ before HIM OR HERSELF. Jesus alludes to this idea in **verse 26.** By way of reminder, he starts off by saying**, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters** … *and then He adds* -- **even his own life**). Now consider His words in **verse 27** (**whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple**). To be a disciple of Christ we must not only love Jesus more than others but we must love Him more than we love ourselves. Following Christ means bearing the cross He bore. We cannot learn from Jesus as His disciples did without being prepared to walk in His footsteps. **What does this look like?**

- **We share in the fellowship of His sufferings**. That's what Paul called it in **Philippians 3:10 -- … that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and may share His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death**. If we say that we are followers of Jesus (**the word "Christian" means Christ-follower**) we must be prepared to endure the same treatment that He received. Certainly, the twelve had to come to grips with the fellowship of His sufferings when Jesus said this to them in **John 15:20 -- Remember the word that I said to you: "A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you**." **AND SUFFER THEY DID, WITH MOST OF THE TWELVE BEING MARTYRED FOR THEIR FAITH**. The only apostle whose death the Bible records is JAMES (**Acts 12:2**). King Herod had James "put to death with the sword," likely a reference to beheading. The circumstances of the deaths of the other apostles are related through church tradition. The most commonly accepted church tradition in regard to the death of an apostle is that the apostle PETER was crucified upside-down in Rome in fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy (**John 21:18-19 -- Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." 19 (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God**.)). **The following are the most popular "traditions" concerning the deaths of the other apostles**: **MATTHEW** suffered martyrdom in Ethiopia, killed by a sword wound. **JOHN** faced martyrdom when he was boiled in a huge basin of boiling oil during a wave of persecution in Rome. However, he was miraculously delivered from death. John was then sentenced to the mines on the prison island of Patmos. He wrote his prophetic book of Revelation on Patmos. The apostle John was later freed and returned to what is now modern-day Turkey. He died as an old man, the only apostle to die peacefully. **JAMES**, the brother of Jesus (not officially an apostle), was the leader of the church in Jerusalem. He was thrown from the southeast pinnacle of the temple (over a hundred feet down) when he refused to deny his faith in Christ. When they discovered that he survived the fall, his enemies beat James to death with a club. **BARTHOLOMEW** also known as **NATHANAEL**, was a missionary to Asia. He witnessed in present-day Turkey and was martyred for his preaching in Armenia, being flayed to death by a whip. **ANDREW** was crucified on an x-shaped cross in Greece. After seven soldiers whipped Andrew severely, they tied his body to the cross with cords to prolong his agony. His followers reported that, when he was led toward the cross, Andrew saluted it in these words: "I have long desired and expected this happy hour. The cross has been consecrated by the body of Christ hanging on it." He continued to preach to his tormentors for two days until he died. **THOMAS** was stabbed with a spear in India during one of his missionary trips to

establish the church there. **MATTHIAS**, the apostle chosen to replace the traitor JUDAS ISCARIOT, was stoned and then beheaded. The **APOSTLE PAUL** was tortured and then beheaded by the evil Emperor Nero in Rome in the mid-to late-60s AD. **There are traditions regarding the other apostles as well, but none with any reliable historical or traditional support**. It is not so important how the apostles died. What is important is the fact that they were all willing to die for their faith. THEY WERE READY AND WILLING TO PARTICIPATE IN THE FELLOWSHIP OF HIS SUFFERINGS BECAUSE THEY LOVED JESUS MORE THAN THEMSELVES.

- **We sacrifice ourselves for the good of others** (**Ephesians 5:1-2 -- Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God**). One of the main goals of the Christian life is to learn to love one another the same way that God loves us …. Sacrificially. This means laying down our lives for the benefit of others. **Warren Sapp** is a hall-of-fame defensive end that played for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. In explaining the depth of his devotion to his former coach, **Tony Dungy**, he once said, "***I would take a bullet for him--if it wouldn't kill me***". A disciple of Christ can afford no such limitations in his ministry to others. He must deny himself for their good. **That's why Jesus shares two illustrations immediately following these verses** … He teaches the value of counting the cost before jumping in with both feet: **(1)** A builder who attempts to erect a tower only to run out of money before it is completed and **(2)** a king preparing for battle with only one half of the available men as his adversary. Though similar, they make slightly different points. **The builder of the tower** is free to build or not as he chooses. **The king**, however, has no choice as he is being invaded. In the first parable Jesus says, "***Sit down and consider the cost of following me***." In the second Jesus says, "***Sit down and consider the cost of refusing my demands.***" There are benefits in aligning ourselves with God rather than having Him as a decidedly stronger opponent. Either way, the cost must be considered! (**Review**: **A disciple puts Christ before anyone else; and before him or herself**)

A Disciple puts Christ before ANYTHING (**Luke 14:33 – So therefore anyone of you who does not renounce all that he has, cannot be my disciple**). The word translated '***renounce***' means ***'to say goodbye***.' When used in relation to things, it means ***'to give up or renounce***.' Jesus is not teaching that a disciple should sell all of his possessions and give everything away, though He did say this to a rich man who loved his "stuff" too much (**Luke 18:22**). ***Rather He is calling us to yield to Him the right of ownership so that nothing stands in the way of our following Him***. ***The Lord's disciples were very aware of this high calling***. Note Peter's comment to Jesus in **Matthew 19:27 – We have left everything to follow you**. Probably, what Peter had in mind was his life as a fisherman, which he briefly went back to after Christ had been raised from the dead. Do you remember that story? Peter and some of the disciples had fished all night and caught nothing. The Lord appeared on the shore, though they did not recognize Him. Jesus told them to let their nets down on the right side of the boat and when they did, the hauled in a huge catch (**See John 21:15-20**). John called out, "**It is the Lord**" and Peter jumped into the water and quickly made his way to shore. Later, while they were relaxing after a fish dinner, Jesus asked Peter, "**Do you love me more than these**?" This was a watershed moment for the disciple when he had to decide if following Christ was more important than catching fish. Of course, he did and we've all been the beneficiaries of his decision. (**Review**: **A disciple puts Christ before anyone else; before him or herself; and before anything else**)

If you're going to grow as a disciple of Christ here at River Ridge Church, you must begin by identifying what Jesus requires of us.

- **As disciples we put Christ before all others.** Why do I say obey rather than love? Because love is evidenced in our obedience. That's what Jesus said. "**If anyone loves me he will keep my word** (**John 14:23**)."
- **As disciples we put Christ before ourselves. A paradox is a seeming contradiction that is nonetheless true. The great paradox of the Christian life is that to find it we must lose our lives for Christ's sake.** This

means that we must adopt His priorities including denying ourselves and taking up our crosses daily to follow Him.

- **As disciples we put Christ before anything else. What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul? For what can a man give in exchange for his soul?**

Closing: To be a follower of Christ requires nothing short of complete and utter dedication. He must come before any other person in our lives. He must come any individual pursuit and He must come before anything. Being a disciple demands nothing less than giving our all. The **December 1987** issue of Life magazine tells of the extent to which Meryl Streep was willing to go to make the final scene of the movie "***Ironweed***," a film about the relationship between a homeless couple, as realistic as possible. She plays the role of a derelict woman who dies in a cheap motel room. For 30 minutes before the scene, she hugged a huge bag of ice cubes in an effort to experience how it felt to be a corpse. As the camera began to roll, **Jack Nicholson**, stands over her sobbing, screaming and shaking her body. She does not move. Through take after take, and even between them, Meryl Streep lies motionless like an iced mackerel. Frightened, a member of the crew whispers to the director, "***What's going on? She's not breathing***." There is absolutely no sign of life. They proceed with the shot, yet even when it is over **Meryl Streep** does not move. Only after 10 minutes does she slowly emerge from her coma-like state into which she deliberately sank. The director is amazed, "***Now that is acting. That is an actress***!" he exclaims. Total dedication always amazes people. Oh, that we would be more dedicated to Christ than Meryl Streep is to acting so that people would say, "***Now that is a Christian!***" **Yes, someone who puts Christ first … before anyone else, before him or herself and before anything else**.