

**September 7, 2025 - Trinity Episcopal Church - 13th Sunday after Pentecost**

**Rev. Elizabeth Molitors**

***For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it?***

***Luke 14:28***

“May we who have gathered  
to share a preached word  
from these ancient words  
encounter a living word. Amen.”

*(from Wilda Gafney)*

Jesus turned to the large crowds that were traveling with him and said, “For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether they have enough to complete it?”

If you've ever purchased – or even just thought about purchasing – a big ticket item like a home or a car, a business or an education, you understand the wise advice of Jesus. Before you commit yourself to a monthly mortgage or a car loan or tuition bills or payroll responsibilities, it's a good idea to figure out whether you can sustain that commitment on an ongoing basis, and is the cost worth it?

You've probably gone through this process any number of times; I know that I have. But when I hear Jesus' admonition to sit down and estimate the cost, the image that came to mind was not of myself poring

over my budget to see how I was going to afford my kid's college tuition or my own student loan payment, and it's not of Jesus' fictional tower builder looking over his tower building plans. The image I saw in my mind's eye was of my now very-grown child as a little kid, maybe 8 or 9 years old, figuring out what it was going to take to bring a pair of gerbils into our home.

I don't remember exactly how or when this desire for gerbils first came about, but I do recall my daughter's proposal to me: that the gerbils would be purchased by them, without any parental funding, and that responsibility for gerbil care and feeding and cleaning wouldn't fall to mom. All that was fine by me, and after I had assurance that the gerbils would be housed in something cat-proof – I had horrible visions of coming home to an empty cage and two satiated cats – I gave my okay to the plan.

First came the library books, about what gerbils needed to live happily and healthfully. And then came the visits to the pet store. Every time we stopped by a Petco or a Petsmart for kitty food or supplies, or even when we were just near one of those stores, we had to stop in, and wander the small pet rodent aisle.

We looked at cages and food and water bottles and bedding, and then Eli would ask me for a pencil and a piece of paper, and start adding up the prices of all these supplies. A couple of weeks later, the scene would be repeated: pencil, paper, up and down the rodent aisle. This happened many, many times, over the course of several months. Never was a

purchase more carefully considered; never were costs more painstakingly calculated.

That's the kind of careful, painstaking consideration Jesus is encouraging in his followers. Not just with regard to how they spend their money, but how they spend their time and live their lives. Do they really have what it takes to be a true disciple of Jesus? Have they really – really – considered the costs? Is it worth it?

Jesus knows that he is headed to Jerusalem, and he anticipates a showdown with the religious and Roman authorities whom he has irritated since day one of his public ministry. He eats and drinks and associates with the wrong people. He preaches and heals with an authority he claims is from God, and in so doing, he undermines the authority of people in high office. He upsets the structures and traditions that those with power and privilege in his society believe to be the natural order of things. And knowing all of this, he is aware that anyone who associates with him, who looks to be or claims to be a disciple of his, is going to suffer whatever bad outcome awaits Jesus.

This isn't just Jesus being over-protective, either. Keep in mind that by the time the gospel of Luke was written, the early Christians – those who continued to tell the stories of Jesus, about his life and death and resurrection – these Jesus followers were being persecuted: arrested and jailed, often tortured and killed. The cost of discipleship was extremely high, not because that's what Jesus required, but because that's how the world tends to treat those who are trying to change it.

And even if we live in a place and a time (although I'm not so sure these days)... even if the likelihood of our being arrested and jailed or tortured and killed for practicing our faith is small, there are other ways that following Jesus exacts something from us, takes its toll.

Jesus' primary commandment, to love our neighbor, can itself be costly. Love costs time and effort and ego. It can be inconvenient or make us feel vulnerable. Following Jesus may cost us relationships (which Luke talked about a couple of weeks ago, the last time I preached). Because if you take Jesus at his word and love and include all the people he did—the ne'er-do-wells and outcasts—then you're bound to tick off folks who think that the call to “love your neighbor” comes with asterisks (like, maybe I only have to extend myself to people who look like me, think like me, worship like me, love like me, have the right education or pedigree or immigration status). If you take issue with any or all those asterisks, that's going to strain or even break some relationships.

Those are some big costs. Does the calculus make sense ? No, probably not.

Is it worth it? Well, I think so. And I think you think so, too. Otherwise, I don't think we would all be here.

Because following the way of Jesus — love, sacrifice, spending yourself on behalf of others, standing up and speaking out for others — doesn't always make rational sense. Love and generosity and justice are

often impractical, and inefficient. Difficult. Sometimes our efforts to do the right things, like Jesus did, get us in trouble. Sometimes they go unnoticed. Sometimes we get our hearts broken. And yet, here we are, still trying.

Earlier this week, I read a reflection by the author and UCC minister, Cameron Trimble, where she talked about the difference between a “you *or* me” approach to the world, vs. “you *and* me.”

“You or me” is grounded in scarcity and competition. “You or me” believes that the things we all need and want are in limited supply — that there’s only one pie to go around, and you and I or “us” and “them” are battling it out for the largest slice. “You or me” is a zero sum game, where I can gain only if you lose, and vice-versa.

Then there’s the “You *and* me” approach, which Trimble describes this way: “You and me” isn’t a slogan. It’s a whole different way of being in the world. It begins with the simple recognition that we belong to one another. That what happens to you touches me. That your flourishing and mine are intertwined.” [<https://www.pilotingfaith.org/p/from-you-or-me-to-you-and-me>]

“You and me” believes that mutual gain is possible. “You and me” makes the pie bigger. It’s generative, hopeful, life-giving, expansive. But “You and me” takes relationship, and trust, and sometimes we disappoint one another. “You and me” follows the way of Jesus, and it can be costly.

For two years, in the late 2000s, there was a daytime game show that broadcast on British television called Golden Balls. It was the ultimate “You or me” vs. “You *and* me” showdown.

In the first part of the game, two contestants collectively built up a pot of money by correctly answering quiz questions. Then they played a final round to determine who was going to go home with how much of the cash winnings.

The final round showdown was determined by — as the game’s name suggests — golden balls. Each contestant would have two spheres: one was titled ‘split’ and the other was titled ‘steal.’ Without revealing their selection to the other person, each contestant would choose one of the balls. If both people chose ‘split’, they would split the money half and half. Win-win. If both people chose ‘steal’, their choices would cancel each other out and no one got anything. Lose-lose. But, if one person chose ‘split’ and the other person chose ‘steal’, then the person who picked ‘steal’ would get the entire sum of money. They would walk away with all of it — thousands of dollars, up to tens of thousands of dollars.

Before the two finalists made their golden ball selection, though, they had a chance to talk with each other, to try to negotiate, influence, cajole and convince the other person to make a particular selection. You can find episodes online, on YouTube, and mostly what you see in the negotiations is the two people attesting to their own honesty and trustworthiness, and they assure each other — six ways to Sunday — that they’re absolutely going to

do the honorable thing, and choose ‘split’ so that they both get the money.  
“You *and* me.”

And, sometimes, that *is* how things worked out. But not as often as you might have hoped or imagined. What happened more often was that one person, after making promise after promise that they would, in fact, choose the ‘split’ ball, ended up choosing ‘steal’ instead. *Their* hope was that the other person *\*would\** actually follow through on their promise, and choose ‘split’, in which case their dishonesty would net them the full amount of money.

But, as frequently happened, neither person kept their word. They both reneged on their negotiated promise, they both chose ‘steal,’ and they both ended up going home empty handed.

After learning about this game, and watching some of the episodes, I came across an interview with one of the contestants who’d gone home without any money because both he and his opponent broke their promise to act for the common good. He explained his actions this way, saying that he preferred to go home with both people having won nothing rather than be, in his words, the “sucker” — the trusting person who chooses ‘split’ and then gets nothing in return because of their gullibility.

This guy preferred the almost certain chance of ending up with nothing, rather than risking looking foolish and naive. He counted the costs, and made his decision. I guess his math made sense to him.

“You and me” is risky, and sometimes we don’t do it because we get scared or we forget or we don’t want to suffer feeling foolish, but it’s the only way we all flourish. We don’t always choose “You *and* me,” but there are plenty of examples to see — from tiny glimmers of self-less kindness to grand acts of heroism — if only we look for them. We don’t always live out “You and me,” but we do it often enough that I have hope.

We are, after all, made in the image of an irrationally lavish and abundant God whose creation is vast and varied beyond imagination; who came to us in the person of Jesus, the Incarnation and embodiment of love and sacrifice. Jesus, who did all sorts of things that made no sense, if he was really counting the cost, but he saw the worth. For you and for me. *Amen.*