**Sermon Sept. 7 2025 Lk. 14: 25-33 & Jer. 18: 1-11**

Intro. Have you noticed how certain things seem to be all the rage in society now? Beards were in, then piercings even in the nose & belly button-now it’s tattoos. In a way, I wonder if Jesus was all the rage in our Gospel passage-“Large crowds were travelling with Jesus” Lk 14: 25. He was a charismatic preacher-He might be the deliverer, the Messiah, who would set the Jews free from the Romans-He performed miracles. This interest & excitement was, however, all froth. The crowds misunderstood what “the Kingdom” was. Ha explained that the Kingdom meant all those who followed King Jesus as a disciple. To be a disciple had some requirements. To follow Him involved giving up all ties to family, ambitions & goals. This was a tough ask, so the cost needed to be counted, but the picture in the Jeremiah reading of what the potter can do to remould a ”marred vessel” is an encouragement.

2. The requirements for being a disciple. What does to “hate your father & mother” etc (v.26a) really mean? It is a strong way of saying that loyalty to Jesus must come first in any clash with family demands. This was an almost unthinkable concept in the Middle East at the time & still is-the personal, emotional & cultural pressures to preserve the family’s reputation & avoid shame were enormous. I recall someone I knew years ago, who was destined to be a doctor, but on following Jesus felt the Lord call him to be a missionary. His family had hoped he would end up earning a pile on Harley Street, so they gave him a very hard time. As Jesus said in Matt. 10: 37 “Anyone who loves his father & mother more than Me is not worthy of Me.” The disciple’s life may even be on the line (v 26b), as we see in the persecution of Christians in North Korea or Nigeria.

3. What does “carry his cross” (v 27) mean? It is not just putting up with an awkward great aunt, as we think nowadays! It is a picture –if you saw someone carrying his cross then, he was a man marked out in a shameful way for an agonising death. For Jesus’ disciple, now, it means being prepared to accept some of what He endured-disapproval, hostility, injustice or persecution. It is, also, a call to put to death our selfish desires. Even, for example, when we say no to some urge to be proud, this urge has a remarkable talent for popping up a bit later-dead one minute & still there next day. This reminds us that as followers of Jesus Christ, we are engaged on a slow transformation, as we, bit by bit, become, very marginally, more like our Saviour. This is the upside of following & knowing Him, which puts into the shade the downside of giving up our usual priorities & carrying our cross.

4. It is, therefore, a tough ask, so Jesus urges his hearers to count the cost of following Him. There’s the story of the builder who could not afford to finish his project (vv28-30) or the king, who realised his army was no match for his opponent’s forces (vv31-32). This counting of the cost can be a major hurdle before anyone follows Jesus at the start, but may reoccur later on in our following of Him. It does suggest a balance sheet. On one side, hand over control of your life to the Lord Jesus-on the other, as you follow Him, He will give forgiveness-peace “peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you.”(Jn. 14:27)-power-”my strength is made perfect in weakness.”(2 Cor. 12: 9) -His presence-“when I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me”(PS. 23: 4) and Heaven. As Jim Elliot, an American missionary murdered by the Auca Indians in South America just after the war, wrote in his diary “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep for what he cannot lose.”

5. The Jeremiah passage does give hope that we are not on our own when we face the cost of discipleship. The picture of the potter shows God can & will remould us to cope with the cost. In Jer. 18: 4a the potter working at his wheel & shaping a vessel finds it “marred”-perhaps, it was his bungle or the clay was faulty. Juliet, learning pottery in her Occupational Therapy training, found it very difficult! Once, she made a teapot, but set the spout so low on the teapot that water came out when it was only half full. The marred vessel is a picture of us-we are very faulty clay. The potter, however, did not chuck the clay away but remoulded it “as seemed best to him.” (v 4b). God can do the same for us-“o house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does… Like clay in the hand of the potter so are you in my hand..” (v 6)-it does need repentance, as well. It is not all up to us to deal with the cost of discipleship & transformation. God in his grace will continue to remould us, despite our reluctance or bolshiness. We only need to be willing to let him do this. How amazing is that!

6. How can we apply all this to our lives? I say this as much to myself as to others. Firstly, we could check that our loyalty to Jesus trump our priorities. Secondly, we should “carry our cross” to say no to our selfish desires, our pride & our lack of kindness to others or wherever we find it easiest to fall short of God’s standards-think of road rage! Lastly, we should be ready to let God remould us “shaping us as (seems) best to him.”