

Rev. Billy Cervený:

Father, thank you for the gift of your word. I pray that you would open the eyes of our heart

and would see you more clearly, Lord, we would learn what it means to be loved by you and to walk in your ways. Thank you, Lord, we pray this in your name, Jesus.

Amen. Have a seat. I'd like to point out my new lectern this morning. This was something Charlie made years ago in his workshop. So if you have any furniture you need made, a little side gig for Charlie. There you go. One of the things that I find being a priest at a church that you grew up in, it's always a nostalgic thing. Every time you walk in somewhere, you see people, you're always remembering things from way back when. I'm already a nostalgic person. The other day I was at home and I was going through this box of old photos that I found back from when I was a kid to high school. You know when you do that it's like an essay in different hairstyles and weight gain and weight loss. I'm like, "Whoa, Billy was having a hard time back then." So anyway, going through these things. I grew up in the 80s here and I went to Episcopal High School. During that time, the style was very different. I used to peg my pants. I used to go to this place called Edge City in Five Points. We get these pink and black polka dot ties and wear them around. It was really scandalous and edgy. I was a musician so I always thought that was kind of cool. Nothing more scandalous than when I spent the night at Matthew Hemphill's house and came home having pierced my ear. One of those old-school fat diaper pins. You remember those? Yeah, I was really infected. Not a good idea, but I remember in seventh or eighth grade there was this haircut that everyone was getting. I just thought it was the coolest thing in the world. I don't know what it was called, but it's kind of cringy now, but we used to call it, it was a punk haircut. We thought that was really neat. What it was, it was really long in the back. It was clean over the ears and it was straight across the front and it had spiky hair on the top. All these guys on my soccer team were getting it and I remember wanting to get this haircut and I was begging my mom. I was like, "Please, let me get this. Come on, please let me do this." She's like, "No, no," and eventually I wore her down. I ended up going and I'm just getting strapped in the chair at Fonda's and she's putting the apron

around my shoulders and she pulls out the scissors and all of a sudden my heart starts beating and I get nervous. I'm like, "Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait. Let's negotiate this." It was a bold move. I didn't want to look ridiculous. I said to her, I was like, "Hey, maybe we can do a different version of this. Maybe we can maybe not go all the way. Maybe we'll just soften it. Why don't you give me this haircut? Let's go for it. I'll do the long and the back clean over the ears. You can do it straight in the front, but just don't put those spikes on the top of it if you don't mind." She goes, "Okay." So she gave me the haircut. Now I learned a lesson that day. There are certain things in your life that you just can't do halfway, like punk haircuts for example. I learned that standing and staring in the mirror in the men's room at Episcopal High School as I was standing there hiding from my friends who had laughed at me for the last hour, because I realized that without those spikes I didn't just get a softer version of this edgier haircut that I wanted. And I didn't get an edgier version of this normal haircut. I got something all together different. I looked like Lloyd Christmas from the Dumb and Dumber movies. If you've ever seen those, I was half in and half out. When you're half in and half out, what you think you're doing is you think you're maintaining the integrity of two things that you're trying to straddle. I'm gonna keep this thing good and this thing

good as well, but rarely does that happen. Usually when you're half in and half out, you destroy both of those things. Half in and half out is rarely a good idea, isn't it? And never is that more true than in our Christian life. Because every one of us in this room, I don't know all your stories, I know a lot of them.

Some of us grew up in the church or some of us came to faith later in life, but every one of us knows that feeling that we want to surrender our lives to Jesus. And we come to Jesus and we want to have our our full Christian makeover. So we climb into the chair and Jesus pulls out his scissors and all of a sudden my heart start pounding. Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, let's negotiate this a little bit. I do want you to, I do want to do this, but maybe you can clean up some here and not there. Maybe you can take a few inches off this part here that makes my church attendance a little better, but actually if you don't mind not touching my finances a little bit, I kind of want to grow those out a bit. Or maybe you can cut on this part here, give me a little trim that makes my language a little better, but if you don't mind I really don't want you to get near my marriage or the way that I parent. I really don't want you to

get near my the way I drink or my sexuality or all these things that we love to kind of keep off to our side, off to the side to ourselves. The problem is is when you're half in and half out with our faith, what happens? It's kind of like that haircut. We don't create a more palatable version of Christianity and I don't create a better version of my normal secular life. We end up wrecking both sides. It's what A.W. Tozier says, and I love his quote, he says, he says, "We are too Christian to enjoy sinning and we're too fond of sin to enjoy Christianity." And functionally this is how this plays out when we do it and we all do it. For some of us this leads to just becoming exhausted because we get worn out trying to keep up with the demands of Jesus that if I could just do it the right way then I'll get the blessing. But I also get worn out with trying to keep up with the demands of the world and to satisfy the world to get it to pay up what it owes me. Now here's a little pro tip, if you're living that way the truth of the matter is the only one paying up is you and it just depletes you and you get exhausted and you get frustrated. And there's another version of this is that when we live like that we wake up and we find ourselves one day that we're filled with shame and we realize that no one really knows who we are and that we live in hiding. This is for Christians who have one foot in their Christian life and their other foot in some secret toxic sin in their life. And we straddle those things and in our Christian world people come to us and they say God loves you. And I'm like yeah he does because I know I've got these cards behind my back and I know the truth about me. Does God really love me?

And I have to hide because if I ever showed you those cards if you knew what I really was like, if you knew what I was really contending with you'd reject me.

So we live in hiding and shame becomes a marker of our life. So what do we do with this? How do we navigate our path through these divided half in half out hearts? Luke 14 is our passage today. It's awesome. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem and he's he's stirring it up with the Pharisees in the ruling class. He's got quite a following at this point. He's got a they're following him through the countryside as he's traveling towards Jerusalem on his journey towards the cross. The Pharisees are really upset with him. All these claims that he's making for which they have no categories. And it says now great crowds accompany Jesus. And he turned and he said to them, "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."

Seriously? This is one of those hard sayings of Jesus, isn't it? Because hating his own our own mother, Jesus loved his mama, didn't he? We see that a lot. See, we got to read this when you read the scriptures here. You remember what we talk about sometimes is that these scriptures were written for you, but they were not written to you. What that means is, is this was written into a context and when Jesus was writing into a Hebrew audience and that phrase, that language around hating stuff was used in Hebrew a lot. And it was an idiom. And the idiom means it's a phrase or a word that says one thing, but it kind of means something else. In the same way I say I'm hot under the collar. You know I mean I'm angry, but I'm not really hot under the collar. I'm trying to break the ice, right? You know these expressions. We have them. And to hate something in this context is less about despising one thing as it is more about loving another thing more. And what Jesus is saying here, what his language, he's not telling people to have this visceral hate of their moms and their dads and their kids and or their lives. What he's saying is you have to prioritize your life. You have to prioritize your affections around him. It's echoes of the first commandment that you will have no other gods before me. And I have to love Jesus and with an allegiance and a priority and everything in my life. And then Jesus goes and these people are looking up at them like okay okay this is not an unfamiliar type of way that they're hearing someone speak to them. And then Jesus doubles down. He says in verse 27, "Whoever does not bear his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. 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." And Jesus is saying you have to follow me. You know if you want to follow me you have to bear your cross. Now you got to keep in mind at this point, bearing your cross, that language had not become a metaphor. That had not something that had worked into their language. When the people are listening to Jesus, a cross in that time was a torturing device. It was a punishment that the Roman Empire would bestow upon the Jewish people or people that had broken the law in some way. And what Jesus is saying that they're looking at him and they're very confused. But we know after its followers of Jesus what Jesus is saying here. He's saying that to bear our cross that we have to submit everything to him. Our money, our

work, our family, my affections, all of the things that I love. And carrying the cross is willing to lay this sacrifice down before him. He's willing to lay this sacrifice down before him. And what Jesus is saying is, "Are you sure you want to do this? Are you counting the costs? Are you measuring every aspect involved before you jump in?"

That's one of the things I love about Christianity. It's how measured it is, how sobered it is, how it appeals to our reason. See, so often in our faith you will read throughout Scripture that we are called to faith, right? But there's no place in Scripture where we are called to blind faith. There's no place where we're called to just jump into some like chaotic religious void as these lobotomized followers of Jesus. "Okay, I'll just judge." It's not what he calls us to do. He calls us to reason with it, to wrestle with it. It's because he doesn't want this to be about raw emotion. He wants it to be a heartfelt conviction that's deep, it's anchored in our understanding. You ever wonder why the Bible's written the way it is? You read all the different Bibles, you got history books, you got biography books, you've got poetry books, you have, you know, futuristic apocalyptic looking books. It's written that way not because someone found a bunch of religious writings and swept it together and wrapped a binding around it and said, "This is what we're gonna read." God wrote it that way because it's his extensive communication and his proof to speak to every aspect of our intellect, of our experience, is to speak to every part of our life so we can reason with it and rationalize with it. What sets Christianity apart from the rest of some of the more mystical religions, it's too reasonable for all the kind of woo-woo, mystical, feeling-based religions that people follow. But it's also way too relational, it's way too personal, and it's way too mystical for people who want to treat God like a Rubik's Cube that we have to solve and then we can get them to do what we want, or that God that we can sort of how beat him into submission with our intellect. What Jesus is saying to these people, he's saying, "Count the cost. Look at me. Am I who I say I am? Jesus, are you God? Are you man incarnate? Did you step from the tomb? If yes, or if no rather, then no cost. Continue as you were. But if yes, then everything changes. I can't ignore the question. I can't be indifferent to Jesus." But like counting the cost, Jesus also means that we are to count the cost of ourselves. See what he's saying in this moment, remember he points to the parable of the builder, and he points to the king is getting ready to go into army. He's saying, "Do you have what it takes? Can

you be fully committed? Can you be not half in and not half out? Can you make God a priority over your children, over your fathers, over your mothers, over your life, over every aspect of it?" And then he closes out by saying, "If you don't renounce all that you have, you cannot be my disciple." Is that you? How are we doing in that? How many of you hear that and all of a sudden your chest gets a little tight? Because mine does. Big time. Because if that's what it takes, I'm out. I can't do that. I know my heart. I know how it is. I know your heart.

Because I know you're like me. I love Jesus. I love God. But I find myself waking up days, and there's so many things that I have to contend with that I love more. There's so many days that I wake up and I'm half in, I'm half out. I'm like, "Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait. Yeah, I want you to touch this, but I don't want you to touch this area over here." And when I read passages like that, hard passages like that, it really, really stirs me. And it makes, and it stirs a fear in me. For it certainly stirs a conviction in me. And if that's what's happening in you, that this passage is doing its job. Because Jesus is stepping on the gas here for a reason. He's speaking to a Jewish people who follow the law. A law that demands perfect perfection. He's speaking to a people that cross every T and dot every I, a religious ruling class that demands perfect conformity. And what he's doing in this moment is he's pointing to the fact that a true disciple has to be perfect in all those ways. And Jesus needed them to feel the full weight of it because they had no concept of their own weakness. They had no concept of their need for a Savior. And in this passage, these people's, the implied response, "Who can live up to this? Who can live up to this statement?"

Exactly. Now you're getting it. It's like the Sermon on the Mount. If you even call your brother a fool, you're guilty of murder. Who can live up to such a thing?

Jesus is exposing their inability and our inability to measure up, not to condemn them, but to drive them to His grace, to reveal who He is. Because the truth is, if I could be a disciple that wasn't half in and half out, if I could be a disciple that was fully in, that I never wavered from those things, why would I need a Savior? Why would I need a Savior? But we're all half in and half out. We all wrestle with these things. And the parables that Jesus is telling here

about the builder trying to measure the cost and the king going off to war, these aren't motivational narratives to give you tips on how to do this better. They're supposed to be mirrors that He holds up to our face and I see myself saying, "I don't have the resources. I don't know how to do this." The good news is, is that while I'm a half in, half out disciple, Jesus is a whole Savior. Where I can't renounce all that I have, Jesus renounced all that He had. Where I am too addicted to glorifying myself, Jesus isn't. He humbled Himself and He took the form of a man and He lived this life. He left the glory of heaven. And where I'm committed to preserving my life, Jesus was committed to hating His.

Meaning He puts something, He loves something more than that. What was that He loved more than that? You and me. And when we count the cost and I say, "Man, I can't do this." Jesus count the cost. He counted the cost and when He climbed on the cross, He paid it in full. He paid the cost for our failed discipleship. He bore the cross for the way that I have dropped my cross a thousand times a day. And this Jesus, He loved us perfectly so that He would come to our hearts that choose imperfect things. Why did He do this? I just said it because He loves us. He wants to redeem us.

And in Christ, it begs the question now, what does it mean to be a full disciple?

What does it mean now for us to be all the way in, to push my chips in and follow Jesus?

It begins when we realize that we aren't the full disciple. It means that Jesus is. He's the faithful one. He was the one who followed the Father perfectly. When I can accept my inability to renounce enough. When I can accept my inability to even love Jesus enough. And I make it my first priority to live a life that's committed to digesting and metabolizing the gospel truth of what it means to be loved by Jesus. And I come and I sit in mornings like this and I drink it in because I need to know. Because when we begin to surrender to those truths, it begins to transform our lives.

That begins to transform my heart. All of a sudden, the first thing I see born is this humility.

This humility when I'm like, I don't, I'm not enough. You are. And I don't need to be enough because you are. I get this relief from this exhaustion that we talked about before because my life now is about living independence on Jesus. It's not about me trying to white knuckle it to perfection. I get relief from that shame because I don't have to hold those cards behind my back. I can integrate my life. I'm like, you know what, Jesus? That's it. Yes, I'm more broken than I would care to admit. And what Jesus says is, yes, you are, but you are more loved than you ever dare realize. My discipleship deepens when I start telling God the truth about my life, and I begin to tell you the truth about my life. Here's what happens. I'm gonna wrap up with this.

The grace does what the law could never do. What the grace does is it begins to shape this grace shaped obedience in my life. It's an obedience that is born out of gratitude

because Jesus is my all, and he becomes my priority. I begin loving others in the way that I have been loved, even when I don't feel like it. I begin serving others in the way that I have been served, even when I still have needs in my life that are screaming at the top of their lungs. I stop hiding the broken parts of my story because they don't disqualify with me. Actually, my brokenness is my ticket in because it is the reason that Jesus came. And when we love in this way, it sets us free to truly love our mothers and our fathers and our lives and our children and all the things we're called to. Jesus on the throne, it sets our hearts free. Amen.