

Luke 14:25-35

On July 2nd 1863 Major General Winfield Hancock was in the battle of Gettysburg. He was positioned on Cemetery Ridge when two battalions, over 1000 rebels, attacked and were on the verge of breaking the Union line and gaining the high ground, which very possibly would have lost the Union the Battle. He rode up to the line and saw the 1st Minnesota Regiment, about 260 men, positioned there trying to hold. Reinforcements were on the way, but still 5 minutes off. He had no choice, if the line broke, the battle was lost. So he did what no one, especially the rebel battalions, expected. He told the 1st Minnesotans, in a desperate attempt to buy more time, he told them to charge.

The Minnesotans knew what that meant. Charging outnumbered 6 to 1. They knew it was suicide. So what did they do? The Minnesotans repeated the command, levelled their bayonets, raised their colors, and charged.

262 men charged, 47 came back. The 82% casualty rate is the highest of any surviving US unit. But it worked. Hancock needed 5 minutes for reinforcements, Minnesota gave him over 10. The charge stunned the rebels, caught them off-guard, halted their charge and bought enough time for reinforcements to fill the line. The line held, the battle was saved, and we know the rest.

Except for maybe the fact that the very next day, when Confederate General Lee did his infamous Pickett's Charge across a mile of open field, who was back on the front line fighting? The Minnesotans. Of the 47 left, 17 more died that day.

Years later Hancock was asked if he regretted what he did to the Minnesotans. He said, "No, I would have sent them even if I knew they all would die. It had to be done." And before you are too harsh toward Hancock, know that he took a shot to the leg in Gettysburg but stayed on the field to see it through, even though it caused him years of pain. And he is quoted saying of the Minnesotans, "There is no more gallant deed recorded in history."

And while ethicists may debate whether what he did was right or not, what I want to reflect on today is the reaction of those Minnesotans. When the commander makes a call, do you run the other way? Do you question his strategy? Do you demand the particulars and the "whys?" Or do you level your bayonet and charge, trusting your leader is working for the good of the troops, the battle, the war, the nation, and I suppose since this is a sermon, can we trust our King that he is working for the good of all creation?

Today Jesus has harsh words for us. Hate your family, compared to your devotion to me. Is he just a narcissist who has to be first? Or is it possible he is working to save them too? "Pick up your cross and follow." Is he a taskmaster, or is it possible

he will strengthen you through the burden and see you through it? “Count the cost of being a disciple because un-salty salt gets thrown away.” Is he ruthless, or longing to see his people flourish and thrive?

We gather here and confess that Jesus is the King. The King, not just a Major General. Yet how often we drag our feet and complain when he tells us to charge. If he told you to forgive that person you hate, would you do it? If he told you to denounce your favorite political figure, would you? If he told you to sacrifice your career, would you? If he told you to turn your guns into plowshares, would you? If he told you to sell all you had and give to the poor, would you? If he told you to confess that sin you’ve been hiding, would you? If he told you to give up that substance, would you? If he told you to stand for the truth against a society that will call you hateful and out of touch, would you? If he told you to charge left and we saw cancer waiting to kill, would we go right? If he told us to charge ahead and we saw death, or poverty, or a loss of liberty, would we balk, would we desert? Or would we charge, not knowing how it is for the good, but trusting there is more at stake, more going on, and that maybe, the King of kings has a bigger picture in mind – even for us. Would we trust that he is good and is stronger than any evil we face, so we can trust his mighty will? Would we, out of fear and respect for the risen King who holds every electron in orbit, would we, when he makes the call

gladly go straight into suffering with our heads held high honored to suffer and fight and die for our King?

Count the cost.

This, Church, is not just a place we gather to try and be nice and pretty good people. This is not a social club. This is not just an hour on Sundays, this is not just 10% in the plate. This is where the King calls us to gather around him.

Do we come then leave with no intention of marching? Do we come only on our own terms? Jesus says, he who has ears let him hear. Do you have ears? Then this message is for you. Not the person in the pew next to you “who could really stand to hear it, pastor.” No. It’s for your ears, and mine.

There are crosses, there is his law, those things we should and shouldn’t do, and it pushes against our pride and our greed and it’s scary. And it hurts, and it is hard. And when the decision is between his word or our conveniences, no, strike that, when the decision is between his word and our LIVES, Are we going to follow the King? Are we going to do what we said when we stood here, “I would rather die than fall away”?

“Oh but that’s crazy, pastor!” Were the martyrs crazy? They could have said, “God why did you bring me here where I have to decide between my right hand or your Name?” Or “What did I do to deserve to have to choose between the lions or your

Name?” And what did they do? They chose the lions. “Bring them on, I will not denounce my King.” Were they crazy? Or did they count the cost?

We think they are crazy because we think that is a high price. Money, popularity, career, our very lives. That’s not a small cost. It’s hard to pick up those crosses. I cannot even imagine the courage to stand up and charge an enemy. But the Minnesotans did it for themselves, each other, their honor, their country, for those enslaved in the south, for freedom. They counted the cost and each of them said, “It’s worth it.” Were they crazy? Or are we, who would sell it all for convenience, safety, or youth. Because the spiritual war against powers and principalities is not “just” the Civil War. We aren’t “just” talking about our country, we are talking about God’s kingdom, his eternal truth and forgiveness and life, and for the saints the world over who confess his Name. And we complain about such little things. Count the cost.

And consider the King. The One who commands all things, yet set his power aside for you. Who was made fun of, ridiculed, spit on, insulted, beaten. Who picked up his cross, was nailed to it, and suffered for you under Pontius Pilate. Pilate counted the cost right. “What’s one innocent life versus a riot and the inevitable arm of Caesar coming to punish me.” He wasn’t crazy. He was “reasonable.” The choice was easy. Or was it?

If he had any idea who he was sentencing do you think the costs would flip? Do you think it was worth it for him to send Jesus to death? Or if he could go back do you think he would rather Caesar kill him a thousand times over than give up the King of kings to a mob again?

And that's the irony for us. We confess we do know who Jesus is! We confess he conquered the grave! But when he tells us we are going to march headlong into sickness, we say, "O Lord how could you burden me so!" What? He gives you eternal life! Yes, he gives you crosses, but he took one for you too, that you may reign with him forever! What is sickness to that? Count the cost!

Count the cost. Eternal life. Nothing offers that. Nothing but Jesus. And if our earthly commanders can give burdens because there is a bigger picture, why do we think the King of kings is unable to see the bigger picture? "Ok you got sick, ok you're going to die." That isn't fun, it isn't easy, but is it possible Jesus is still working for your good and the good of the world? Even if we don't know the particulars. Stand up, stand firm, your King has given a command. Who will go and follow it? Or is he too foolish to know what is good? Or is he too weak to see you through it?

Has he not gone through anything similar before? Ah, folks this is our King. He does not sit in the back and ask us to fetch water and carry crosses while he

lounches. He goes ahead, he fights alongside. He knows the pain, he knows the heartache, he knows the bitterness, he knows the frustration, he knows the depression. All that pain, he knew he would have to endure it to save you. He could have looked at your sins and said, “No way, not worth the suffering or inconvenience for that lousy person.” But when he counted the cost and looked at you, yes you, not the person next to you, he looked at you, he looked at the cross, and he said “worth it.” That is his love for you!

And not only is he loving, he is strong. He conquered that cross, hell, and the grave. What battle will he lose? Which soldiers will he sacrifice meaninglessly? Especially when he promises to go with you through everything he asks you to carry and see you through it.

So stand fast! When the fighting is fierce, and we waver. We cry, we complain, we panic and don't know what to do. Does he whip you? Does he court marshal you? Or does he come alongside, forgive, and strengthen you to fight once more? That is our King. He has saved us by grace and gives us more grace to stand, and follow, and fight.

Put yourself in the civil war. It's hot, it's scary. There is dysentery going around, your friend lost an arm and its infected. And now the charge is called. But your commander is not Hancock. It's the King of kings. The king of kings who, after

this charge, after this war, which is so close to over, he will come to you, fallen or not, and raise you up healed and whole.

Can you even imagine how brave his soldiers would be? Who wouldn't fight for him? Who would ever doubt his command? He has never lost, he fights with you, he raises you up. This is our King!

You have ears. So count the cost, brothers and sisters. And trust me, if you do the math... the numbers aren't even close.

God be praised.