

Christ Church, Middle Haddam

The Reverend Dr. Catharine Randall

Labor Day, 2010 Luke 14:25-33

Count the Cost and Stay the Course:

Strategies for Building on Faith

This is the third sermon in the series I started this summer entitled “Practical Piety”. In the first sermon, I preached about keeping our spiritual focus in a material world. In the second, I talked about spiritual healing in an age of addiction. And this sermon is entitled: “Count the Cost and Stay the Course: Strategies for Building on faith.”

Further, since this is Labor Day today, this is a sermon for all of you workers out there, especially for anyone in the building industry, contractors, masons, carpenters, laborers ... Because today’s Gospel is about building, building a sure structure for our faith.

When you became a Christian, did you ever stop to think how DIFFICULT an undertaking being a Christian can be? Probably not; most of us don’t. Most of us are baptized into the church as infants, so we really don’t know what we’re signing up for! But if you came back to the faith as an adult, maybe you have given some reflection to what you want your life to be like, how you want others to perceive you, now that you have this chosen identity of being a Christian. Think about it for a moment. When you don’t just “talk the talk,” but really stand up for Jesus, what do other people see? What are you

showing to the rest of the world? How do I look, standing up here? Is my witness bright, or is it tarnished?

Counting the cost and staying the course are two techniques for remaining a life-long Christian. In today's reading, Jesus asks his followers, who of you, if you want to build a structure, does not first sit down and tally up your assets and your projected expenses, your credit and debit sheet, before beginning to build? And which one of you, if you were a ruler, would not count how many men were in the other guy's army before pitting your own military forces against them?

Jesus is saying: this is a tough walk to talk. Plan for it. See what your strengths and weaknesses are. Be realistic. Because if you set off down this road, then suddenly just ditch out, people are going to think pretty poorly of Christians. And our job is to burnish Jesus' banner. God knows, some have tried to vilify it and reduce it. In this world, we must keep our witness intact.

Jesus also says, in today's Gospel, you must give up everything you have if you want to follow me. Now those are hard words and perhaps don't sound terribly practical! But this saying is less painful than it at first appears, because the term that Jesus uses for "give up" can also – perhaps better—be translated as "use wisely." If you use wisely the gifts and resources given to you, you will be enabled to continue in the path of faith and follow Jesus.

There's a whole series of travel books called *Curiosities: Quirky Characters, Roadside Oddities, and Other Offbeat Stuff*. Another guide book is called *Weird Connecticut*. According to both of these books,

Connecticut Curiosities and Weird Connecticut -- and they're right, Randy and I have seen this for ourselves! -- if you come to Woodbury, where Randy and I live, you can view a strange and wonderful, weird and wackerjobby, structure that borders route 6 on the way out of town. Seriously! You should come visit! You don't want to miss this! Apparently, the guy building it is some sort of mason. But he's been building it for DECADES and in the oddest, most idiosyncratic way possible! There are pillars flung about as if a giant had had a temper tantrum, puzzling parapets, doors leading nowhere, piles of contracting material heaped up, some tarped, some timber just rotting away ... It is unsightly and unsettling. The owner keeps running out of money. So he adds on as he can, and the result is truly odd ... and unfinished.

Clearly, this builder did NOT sit down to count the cost . And, while he may be staying the course --who can tell?!-- , the exterior display, while bemusing, is NOT impressive!

So, let's be practical. If you want to stay the course, first you must sit down and count up the cost. And then, when you begin to build, use right-thinking for your plumb-line and honesty for your level; be sure to have lots of fortitude and determination to use as concrete, and remember those spiritual gifts to decorate both the inside and the outside of your house so beautifully. And, most of all, remember that God is the Master Builder, and that, as the old hymn reminds us, CHRIST is made the sure foundation, Christ the head and cornerstone!"