Budgeting is a planning tool that forces us to choose our priorities. It is a functional tool for the wise use of our resources (our money, our time, our energy, our relations, ultimately our very life.) Individual families use it as well as faith communities. It helps us decide what we value most and what strategies to employ to achieve our goals. Some people are in such dire conditions that they have to decide whether they are going to use their limited resources on food, on medicines, on rent, on their electric bill or on keeping their telephone active. Nativity has helped quite a few people in such conditions. Other people may find themselves struggling in their decisions around the amount of time and energy to invest in particular projects, in difficult conversations or in fragile relationships. We seem to be constantly confronted with the healthy underlying questions: Can I afford to do it? Can I afford *not* to do it?

Becoming a disciple of Jesus and following him in his way of the cross is not as simple as being baptized, returning to the Church at the time of marriage and then later on for our funeral (the *hatch*, *match*, and *dispatch* events of our life.) It’s not about performing a cultural and religious duty when we celebrate the rites of passage or about being identified as a Christian by name only. In times of discernment of our religious commitment, it’s important to value and honor precepts and commandments, but exactly how far do we want to go with our commitment to a godly life? Are we ready to jump in with both feet or do we want to be cautious and reserved? Someone blurted out during a conversation that too

much of a good thing is not good and so in the same vein, he continued, too much religion is not good. I did not ask at the time what he meant by it, but I imagine he wanted to relay a certain uneasiness with radicalized expressions of the faith bordering on fanaticism and intransigence. Sometimes people can be that way and even worse when they declare to be Christians and at the same time use power, affluence and resources to harm others and the planet. Much of Christian intransigence, hypocrisy, and bigotry has been the cause of distress and scandal to many.

Jesus certainly does not call one to fanaticism but to profound self-examination and total commitment. He does not care for superficial commitment or tagalongs. There is no denying that the Christian life is challenging. It is visualized and celebrated in the baptismal immersion into the death and the resurrection of Jesus. In Baptism, the Christian starts with the renunciation of the selfish and fear-based ways of the world and continues, completely drenched, as a new person in the Spirit of Christ, identifying with him and carrying the cross, with the promise to rise one day a new creation ([2 Cor. 5:17](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Corinthians+5%3A17&version=NrsV)).

This process of transformation from darkness into light is not easy and requires total commitment and alertness. “Apart from this attitude, the Christian mission becomes like salt which has lost its taste, which is no longer able to flavor those who are in need of it, which is itself unable to be restored, and which is consequently worthless (Lk. 14:34-35)...The followers must share Jesus’ attitude

of total self-giving, placing the lives of others ahead of their own from every point of view.”[[1]](#footnote-1) That is the reason for Jesus’ harsh and jarring words for the crowds: *Whoever does not love me more than father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself cannot become my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.* Paradoxically, it is when we are clear about the meaning of true family and choose Christ over our blood relations ([Lk. 8:19-21](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+8%3A19-21&version=NrsV)) that we are able to demonstrate greater love for them (even when that love is not acknowledged, rejected or reciprocated.)

Continuing with his shocking and outrageous statements, Jesus makes analogies to a builder and a king who must first sit down and estimate the cost of the projects they are considering. What if they can’t finish what they start? If they conclude that there is no viable future in their plans, wouldn’t they be foolish to go through with them? Jesus raises the stakes for true discipleship: one must renounce family ties, his/her life and all possessions. Can we do it? Can we truly say we have the stamina to deny ourselves and follow on Jesus’ way of the cross? Can we afford to stick to our faith and Kingdom values for the long run to the point of giving our very life for the world following the example of Jesus?

It’s not easy to speak up in defense of the scorched Amazon Forest, or in defense of the National Parks under the constant threat of logging[[2]](#footnote-2) or oil drilling.[[3]](#footnote-3) It’s not easy to point out that the children separated from their parents at the Southern border suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health problems.[[4]](#footnote-4) It’s not easy to expose religious bigotry and xenophobia, racism and white supremacy with all their cultural and legal implications because they are sticky subjects and hard conversations to have even within one’s family or church. In today’s polarized social discourse we have lost the capacity of arguing a topic without taking it too personally and attacking others with abusive words or violent means. But then again we need to ask ourselves: Can we afford not to? Or are we foolishly trying to save our life from the trouble of disconnection with others (Lk. 9:24; Lk. 17:33)?

Through the two parables referring to the tower builder and the king deciding on a war, we are presented with two aspects of discipleship. As prof. Archibald Hunter has observed: “In the first parable Jesus says, ‘Sit down and reckon whether you can afford to follow me.’ In the second he says, ‘Sit down and reckon whether you can afford to refuse my demands.’”[[5]](#footnote-5) With the two parables, Jesus seems to point out that either following him or refusing to follow will cost one’s all. The question is not about risk management. Losing it all will happen either

way. The question is whether one will lose one’s life as a follower of Jesus and for the sake of God’s Kingdom, or as one who is in fear and denial and refuses to obey and to follow. Which response is the most viable? Which is the most promising? Life in Jesus and for the gospel is certainly the riskier, but then again, what sense does a life without Jesus have? In the short run, compromises and quietism seem to be the most safe and expedient. But Christianity is not a low-risk, low-cost endeavor.

The cost of discipleship takes many shapes according to our personal situations. For some people it looks like a redirection of time and energy; for others a change in personal relationships or habits; for others a commitment of financial resources. For each, the call is all consuming. Discipleship requires a complete evaluation of one’s priorities and total commitment to God’s Kingdome rule.

Jesus challenges us again and again out of our comfort zone to follow in his footsteps with our cross. Certainly, it does not sound the most reasonable (Lk. 6:27; Rom. 12:17-21) or the most respectful (Lk. 9:22-27). There may not be “viable future” in following Jesus in the short run. But sure enough there is resurrection.

1. Eugene LaVerdiere, Luke, p. 197. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2Cz3T4UGmE> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/oil-drilling-coming-national-park-or-monument-near-you> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KeJX7NkpIhQ> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. A.M. Hunter, Interpreting the Parable, quoted in Richard N. Longenecker, The Challenge of Jesus Parables, 293. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)