

# Counting the Cost



*Luke 14:25-33*  
*Year C Proper 18*

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## Parts by scene

■ = large part    ▲ = medium sized part    ● = small part

		1	2	3	4	5
▲	<b>Peter</b> - the most headstrong disciple, and the least afraid of a fight, but never the smartest person in the room	●		▲		
▲	<b>James</b> - the most officious disciple, often the most frustrated with Jesus' unconventional decisions (such as his allowing women to join the group)	▲		▲		
▲	<b>Judas</b> - possibly the deepest thinker and best organizer, the one who usually sees the big picture most clearly, and also the disciple with the best sense of humor	▲				▲
●	<b>John</b> - the gentlest and most caring of the disciples	●		▲		
●	<b>Phillip</b> - one of the youngest disciples, always well-meaning and honestly curious, sometimes lacking in confidence	▲				
▲	<b>Matthew</b> - a former tax collector (i.e. a agent of the Roman occupation of his own people) who in his repentance from that past life is the most religiously fervent of the disciples	▲		▲		
■	<b>Jesus</b>		■			▲
▲	<b>Follower #1</b> - a man who seeks to join Jesus but becomes instantly alienated by Jesus' response		●		▲	
▲	<b>Follower #2</b> - a man who starts off more serious than Follower #1, but sours on Jesus just as quickly		▲		▲	
▲	<b>Follower #3</b> - a man who seeks to join Jesus but becomes confused by Jesus's response		●		▲	
▲	<b>Follower #4</b> - a man who seeks to join Jesus but is scared off by Jesus' response		●		■	
▲	<b>Follower #5</b> - the most committed and courageous of the men seeking to follow Jesus		●		▲	
▲	<b>Joanna</b> - a wealthy woman with a perceptive and agile intellect who abandons her life as the co-manager of King Herod's household to follow Jesus			▲		

## Scene 1

James , John , Judas , Matthew , Peter , Phillip

*{The group is traveling down the road accompanied by a large following.}*

**Peter** *[happily]* Look at all these people!

**James** *[in amazement]* It's incredible considering how rude the rabbi's been to the crowds lately.

**Judas** *[neither happy nor unhappy, just stating a fact analytically]* We didn't consider that his harshness would have a double effect: it filtered some out, but drew others in.

**John** *[with satisfaction]* I guess he knew what he was doing all along.

**Judas** Did he?

**Phillip** You just said it yourself, didn't you?

**Judas** I said we lost some and gained others. But the end result was a loss: he drove away far more than he attracted.

**James** So what? I'd rather have a few truly dedicated men than a thousand dilettantes.

**Judas** I'd rather have a thousand men marching through the gates of Jerusalem no matter how committed they were. A larger force would make it more likely that others would join us - and that the Romans would think twice before trying to stamp us out by force.

**Matthew** *[firmly]* It's purity of heart that will win in the end.

**James** That's right. The rabbi could do it all himself if he had to. We're not needed; we're privileged to be part of it.

**Phillip** Still, I'm happy we'll have all these extra people along. There must be almost 300 of them!

**Peter** It's a not exactly an army, but it's a decent sized company.

**Matthew** It's the perfect size for an army.  
Gideon raised an army of twenty-two thousand to fight the Midianites, but the Lord said, "That's too many! Send home the ones who are fearful." And so the twenty-two thousand became ten thousand. But the Lord said, "That's still too many! Take them on a hard march down to the river and send home all those who lack vigilance, who kneel to lap up their water like dogs." And so

the ten thousand became 300. And the Lord said, "With these 300 will I deliver Israel!"

**James**        There you go. Who needs a huge army? Smaller is better.

**Phillip**        But why? The big army would still have had those 300 great soldiers, wouldn't it? The rest could only help, couldn't they? Matthew, does the story say why Gideon had to reduce it so much?

**Matthew**       That God's glory might be the greater.

## Scene 2

**Follower #1 , Follower #2 , Follower #3 , Follower #4 , Follower #5 , Jesus**

*{At a rest stop, Jesus rises to address his new followers.}*

**Jesus**            *[brusquely]* Hey! You people! Why are you following me?

**Follower #1**       We believe in your message, Rabbi.

**Jesus**            Really? Suppose my message was to hate your father and mother. Would you still follow?

**Follower #1**       Well, no, of course not!

**Jesus**            *[to another one of the followers]* And you! Why are you following me?

**Follower #2**       I believe in your mission: the liberation of Israel. And don't ask me whether I'd hate my father and mother, because I already do! They're loyalists, and disowned me many years ago.

**Jesus**            Suppose the first action of any Revolution were to execute them.

**Follower #2**       What? What are you saying? You're insane!

**Follower #3**       Are you being serious, or is this some kind of test?

**Jesus**            *[impatiently]* What kind of movement do you think you're trying to join?

**Follower #3** A movement for freedom.

**Jesus** How else might you describe it? *[to all the followers]* Anybody.

**Follower #4** A return to God?

**Follower #5** A revolt against the Romans!

**Jesus** A revolt against the Romans...and how do you think the Romans would react to a revolt?

**Follower #5** I'm not afraid to die!

**Jesus** Good! But what about the rest of you? Are you all ready to die as well?

*{A long silence.}*

**Follower #4** *[mustering his courage]* I'm willing to take my chances.

**Jesus** What if your chances were zero? What if any revolt were doomed to failure? Would you still join it, knowing that ahead of time?

**Follower #5** Are you saying you're going to fail? How can that be? Aren't you the Messiah?

**Jesus** And what does that mean?

*{Another long silence.}*

**Jesus** *[going into preaching mode]* Who attempts any task without first counting the cost? What builder rushes to lay a foundation before he's calculated what the whole job will be, so he doesn't run out of wood halfway through, or get caught without a roof when the rains come? Or what king going to battle doesn't employ diligent intelligence to ascertain the size of the enemy forces, so that he can make sure he has sufficient strength to defeat them?

*[angrily]* Don't bring me your fragile hopes and idle dreams! Unless you come to me with the deaths of your parents and your friends and your brothers and your sisters, indeed with your own deaths held firmly in your hands, you're better off staying home!

### Scene 3

James , Joanna , John , Matthew , Peter

*{Some of the disciples gather in the evening.}*

**James** Well, we're back where we started.

**Matthew** It's for the best.

**James** *[to Matthew]* Thanks. I have to keep remembering that.

**Joanna** What are you talking about?

**Peter** How our numbers go up and down.

**Joanna** Yeah, what happened to all those people? I thought I heard them saying they were going to march all the way to Jerusalem with us.

**Peter** *[with some relish]* The rabbi scared them away!

**James** It was for the best. We don't need them.

**John** Judas wasn't so sure about that.

**Peter** Where is he, anyway? I want to hear his side of it again.

**James** Probably off sulking somewhere.

**Matthew** Judas believes it will be by strength of arms that we'll be freed, but he's wrong. It will be the arm of the Lord that lifts the yoke off our necks.

**Joanna** You know, that's what I thought myself when I joined. I certainly wasn't thinking about going into battle! I thought the rabbi's teachings would spread and change people spiritually.

**Peter** Even the Romans?

**Joanna** Sure, why not?

**John** And maybe it doesn't even have to reach the Romans for us to be free. Maybe there's a freedom we can have while still under Roman rule. Maybe it's more a question of our hearts, where we

locate the center of our lives.

**James** You're basically talking about *not* being free. You're rationalizing not fighting!

**Peter** Buck up, John. We're sure to win! James is probably right: the rabbi doesn't need us. He'd win no matter what. So it's in the bag!

**Joanna** *[to Matthew]* You seem to know the scriptures better than anybody. What do they say about the Messiah's coming? Will there be any resistance? Will there be military battles?

**Matthew** "The Lord you say you seek, the Messenger of the Covenant you say you long for, shall suddenly come to his temple. He shall indeed come! But who will be able to stay the Day, or remain standing once he appears? For he is a refiner's fire. And he will purify the sons of Levi, that they might offer sacrifice to God once more in righteousness, as in days of old, as in former years."

#### Scene 4

Follower #1 , Follower #2 , Follower #3 , Follower #4 , Follower #5

*{The men who tried to join Jesus earlier discuss the experience on their way back to their home town.}*

**Follower #3** Well, that was disappointing.

**Follower #4** I don't know what I'm going to tell my wife.

**Follower #3** I thought she didn't want you to go in the first place.

**Follower #4** Exactly! We had a doozy of a fight and I finally had to put my foot down. I even made this big speech about our children's future! How can I slink back home now?

**Follower #2** Tell her he turned out to be a nut! She probably didn't anticipate *that*.

**Follower #4** It's true. We both thought so highly of him. But do you really think he's crazy?

- Follower #2** Of course! All that talk about killing people's parents? That's the kind of talk you hear just before they bring out the Kool-Aid. We ought to report him to the authorities.
- Follower #3** I thought he had a point. If we were going to join up with him, we had to think about how it might affect the people we love, not just ourselves.
- Follower #1** You mean people like our parents, whom he told us to *hate*?
- Follower #3** I don't think he meant hate literally.
- Follower #2** How else can you mean it?
- Follower #4** Maybe the idea was that we should be so dedicated to the cause that our feelings for our parents would seem like hate in comparison.
- Follower #1** Are you serious? You could pretty much excuse anything that way!
- Follower #3** That's not it, anyway. It's about the revolt. What he meant was that we had to be willing to see our parents get killed in the struggle if it came to that. "Hate" them in that sense. And to be honest, it made me rethink my resolve. I'm not sure I'm up to it, after all.
- Follower #2** No. He meant more than that. Don't forget, it was my parents he was talking about. The loyalists. He wasn't talking about nationalist parents being executed by the Romans. He was talking about *doing* the executing.
- Follower #4** But he also talked about being killed himself. When he asked about the "zero percent", I think he meant it. It wasn't just hypothetical. He knows he can't win, but he's willing to be a martyr.
- Follower #3** Is that why you didn't follow him?

**Follower #4** Yeah. I was willing to fight, and even risk death. But I wasn't ready to be a guaranteed martyr. No matter how much it might help my children's future.

**Follower #5** *[grimly, finally speaking up]* Then you should have joined up, after all.

**Follower #1** Why? We know *you* were prepared to die, but he just said he wasn't.

**Follower #5** Because nobody's going to die! That's why I decided *not* to follow him.

**Follower #2** What do you mean? You think the revolt's going to succeed without the Romans trying to stop it at all?

**Follower #5** I don't think there's going to be a revolt!

*{There's a stunned silence.}*

**Follower #3** Do you think he was lying about planning one?

**Follower #5** When did he ever say he was planning a revolt?

*{Another stunned silence.}*

**Follower #4** But...but everybody knows that's what he's about. His own disciples claim he's the messiah.

**Follower #5** But has *he* ever said it? Did he once say it to us?

**Follower #1** He said it lots of times! He asked us how we thought the Romans would react to a revolt. He asked us if we were willing to die in one!

**Follower #2** Hold on. I thought there was something funny about how he was phrasing things, and now I think I see what he was doing. Every time he mentioned the revolt, it was hypothetically! "How do you think the Romans *would* react?" "What if *any* revolt *were* doomed to failure?"



**Follower #5** Exactly. He took great pains to *not* say there was going to be a revolt!

*{Silence once more.}*

**Follower #3** Then what's he doing?

**Follower #5** I don't know. Maybe he's one of those people who believe that spiritual renewal alone can free us. Or maybe he's just a huckster, raking in donations from his followers. The only thing I'm sure about is that he has no intention of fighting.

## Scene 5

Jesus , Judas

*{Jesus finds Judas off by himself.}*

**Jesus** You weren't pleased that I chased all those people away, were you?

**Judas** Honestly? No. You urged them to count the cost as if they were kings going into battle, but you're *literally* a king going into battle. Don't you think those 300 foot soldiers could have helped?

**Jesus** They weren't willing to give up their lives.

**Judas** But the more supporters we have, the less likely it is that *anybody* will have to give his life! That's the math of how these things work. If we were to march into Jerusalem with ten thousand followers, the risk would probably go down to almost zero. We couldn't find ten thousand people willing to die for the cause, but we could certainly find ten thousand people willing to *not* die!

**Jesus** What does your math tell you will happen if we enter Jerusalem just as we are?

**Judas** What? With just the dozen or so of us? It tells me we'll be ignored or laughed at by the people, and easily defeated if we try to fight anyway. That we'll fail. That our people will remain under the yoke of Roman oppression for another two hundred years.

**Jesus** That's the cost *you* must count.

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*You can read my thoughts about this play and respond with your own at  
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