

**“Counting The Cost”**  
**Pentecost 15, Proper 18C – September 5, 2010**

Jeremiah 18:1-11; Psalm 39:1-5, 10-16;  
Philemon 1-21; Luke 14:25-33.

**Introduction:**

Change is costly. The greater the change, the greater the cost. Sometimes the change is positive, sometimes it is negative, however because it is a positive change does not mean it is without cost.

About five years ago my doctor told me she was going to put me on a prescription medication in order to lower my cholesterol levels. At that time my cholesterol was 268, and the medical target was to get below 200. Since then, the recommended maximum level has decreased to 175.

I thought about her recommendation for a few moments. My cholesterol levels had been creeping upwards for 20 years, and she was the third doctor to warn me to make the lifestyle changes necessary to bring them down under 200. I could have said “yes” to her prescription for one of the statins. They seem safe, and they are effective. But something inside me wasn’t willing to pay the emotional cost of being on a prescription drug for the rest of my life to do for me what I was too unmotivated and undisciplined to do for myself. I knew I

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needed to get into good cardio-vascular condition, and together with changing my eating habits, loose between 50 – 60 pounds.

It was an “ah-ha!” moment. Change was coming. There was no doubt about it. The question was, “how was I going to pay for it: daily medication, or a lifestyle change of exercise and different eating habits”? In that moment I knew my answer was going to be the lifestyle route. That was the harder choice, but I knew I was willing to pay that cost versus the prescription route.

Friday, I had my annual physical, and my doctor was ecstatic. Altogether, I’ve lost about 55 pounds, 27 since last year’s physical; and, best of all, my cholesterol level is now 146, down 102 points from it’s peak.

In dollars, it would have cost a lot less to go on the Satins. I would have spent a few hundred dollars each year in insurance co-payments. Because of the choices I made, I’ve spent thousands of dollars on bicycles and equipment, running shoes, training apparel, the cost of belonging to a training group, and fees for entering various races, sometimes including motels, food, and gas.

Along the way, Shannon and I had many special moments. We were training partners, cheerleaders for each other, someone to complain to, and someone to try

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and make proud. The cost of a daily prescription could never have generated those moments. For me, they were worth the extra dollar cost! It was the harder, but for me, the better choice. Sometimes, counting the cost, involves yielding to God's will for us, even if we are not completely clear at the moment what exactly His will is.

Jeremiah's illustration of the Potter and the Clay reminds us, we are the clay, and God is the Potter. It also says

### **There Is A Cost To Being God's Clay.**

When we realize that our entire life is lived in the sight and knowledge of God; and for us who have given our lives to Christ, our life is literally lived in the palm of God's hand, our world-view changes. We are clay and God can build us up, or tear us down. If God doesn't like what we are becoming, God has the power to take our lives apart in order to remake them into something that is pleasing. Jeremiah wrote: *"The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him."*

That's the cost of belonging to God. If we aren't living the way we are supposed to, God will rework us. It is not easy being a lump of clay trying to make ourselves into a pretty pot, only to have God say, "This pot is too

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flawed. It needs to be remade.” This involves great trust in God. As our world is crumbling around us, we have to trust that our God is the Potter who is not breaking us apart for the fun of it; it is to make something better of us, something more pleasing, more beautiful, something without flaws that will cause us to blow apart in the heat of life’s furnace, something better able to serve the purposes of God.

This is what the Psalmist is writing about in Psalm 139: 1-6, 14).

- <sup>1</sup> *LORD, you have examined me  
and know all about me.*
- <sup>2</sup> *You know when I sit down and when I get up.  
You know my thoughts before I think them.*
- <sup>3</sup> *You know where I go and where I lie down.  
You know thoroughly everything I do.*
- <sup>4</sup> *LORD, even before I say a word,  
you already know it.*
- <sup>5</sup> *You are all around me—in front and in back—  
and have put your hand on me.*
- <sup>6</sup> *Your knowledge is amazing to me;  
it is more than I can understand.*
- <sup>14</sup> *I praise you because you made me in an amazing and  
wonderful way.  
What you have done is wonderful.  
I know this very well.*

Or, counting the cost of our discipleship might be as personal as submitting again to a slave-slaveholder relationship as Paul is writing about in his letter to Philemon. Onesimus is going to return to slave status - at

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what cost? And, will Philemon have the grace to receive back his slave without punishing him. What will that cost his ego and his status among fellow slave-owners? Not only is Paul going to send Onesimus back to his rightful owner, he is beseeching Philemon to expand his relationship with Onesimus from slave to that of a Christian brother. Further, if Philemon feels that Onesimus owes him anything by being away from his service, Paul gives him permission to charge it to his account.

It is as if, Paul is saying that once he considered the price Jesus paid for him to become one of the redeemed of the Lord, there is now no cost too great for him to pay as a thank offering for Jesus' generosity. Have you considered

### **The Cost Of Your Redemption?**

Simply spoken, it cost Jesus his earthly life to redeem each of us. Remember, on the Cross, Jesus said, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* It cost God the loss of his son, if even for a moment, to pay for our sins.

How much are you worth to God? You are worth the very earthly life of His eternal son, Jesus Christ. Jesus tasted death in order that we might taste freedom

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from sin and begin to enjoy the benefits of heaven now.

What if God, the Father had approached Jesus and asked Him to leave Heaven and come to earth in order to die for your sin; and Jesus replied, "I'm not willing to bear that cost for Richard/Don/Ed/Betty", or whosoever. Where would we be right now without Jesus' willingness to pay the cost for our sin?

As redeemed clay in the Potter's Hand, we will be asked to make different payments in this life for the privilege of serving the purposes of God. Our cost might be financial; it might be time; it might mean repenting of a particular sin; it might be stepping up to serve in a ministry that we are not excited about because it is not our primary ministry, but we know it needs our help right now to get it going: like Children' Chapel, or AWANA, or cooking for Wednesday dinner, or cleaning in the Kitchen, or giving up a Saturday morning for The Garden Party, or the Free Garage Sale, or spending \$17.00, to attend the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Dinner.

There are many ways, some huge, some small, some subtle, some life-changing, that we have to count the cost of making necessary changes in our lives in order to better serve Jesus Christ. But, what can the clay say to the Potter, other than: "Here I am, Lord; remake me, and

use me as thou wilt.”