

Luke 14:25-33 "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it?"

It was once one of Minneapolis' largest and costliest homes – the Italian Renaissance Revival-style mansion built in 1913. It was built for the ill-fated son of legendary businessman John W. "Bet-a-million" Gates. John W. Gates made his fortune in barbed wire, railroading, and oil. He was called "Bet-a-million" Gates after wagering a tidy \$1 million dollars on a horse race in England back in 1900 (just shy of 30 million today).

His son, Charles, seems to have inherited his father's *extravagance* gene. After marrying socialite Florence Hopwood of Minneapolis, Charles Gates announced his plans to build a "cottage" overlooking Lake of the Isles. The so-called "cottage" came in at around 38,000 square feet (to put that in perspective: that's larger than the James J. Hill mansion in St. Paul and roughly the size of 6 NBA basketball courts.

Yes, the house was a stone palace outfitted with the best of everything money could buy: multiple marble staircases, elevators, gilded fixtures, stone vaulted ceilings, and what is reputed to have been the nation's first home air-conditioning system, installed by Carrier. The estimated cost was in the millions of dollars.

When Jesus spoke of the cost of discipleship, he used building a tower as an example. ***Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? ²⁹ For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, ³⁰ saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'***

To our confirmed members, think back for a moment to the day you stood before this or another congregation and pledged your faithfulness to Christ, *even at*

the cost of your life. (For our, this is a vow that you also will be asked to make before God and this congregation.) The question is, how many of us have made or will make that vow without truly understanding what it would mean to remain faithful even if it should cost you your life?

Sadly, for Charles Gates, with his Lake of the Isles "cottage" still to be completed, money couldn't buy him a reliable appendix, and he died during surgery, apparently from complications resulting in a heart attack. He was 37.

Now to be fair, his building project didn't cost Gates his life. But I wonder if it ever even crossed his mind that he might not live to see the home completed or, for that matter, live to see the next day. What about you as you sit here today? Do you have a better understanding or greater appreciation today than you did back when you made your vow to be faithful to your Lord and Savior even if it should cost you your life?

Our very lives, huh? That kind of cost for discipleship is just so beyond our reach, isn't it? It's almost as if we're willing to make such an *extravagant* vow because we don't ever expect to have to pay that cost. It's kind of like those of us who have said that if we won the lottery we'd give it all to the charity or donate a new church. Offered to the glory of God and the furthering of his kingdom...a worthy thought. But what about everyday generosity toward those needy of our talents, our gifts, our time, our witness – and these are gifts from the Lord that we have in our hands right now. Sadly, we're more than willing to offer the greatest cost when it seems so unlikely that we'll ever have to pay, while so often the least cost, something within our grasp, is the most difficult to pry from our hands and hearts. All of a sudden the cost is too great.

Charles Gates' widow, on his death, inherited a fortune of \$10,000,000, making her one of the richest women in America. She did move into the palatial home her husband had built upon its completion in 1914. But by 1916, she had remarried and moved to Connecticut. A St. Paul physician

bought the house but never lived in it. He himself died in 1929, but there were no buyers for such a costly property. It was estimated that the maintenance of the residence alone was about \$60,000 per year. In the end and with little choice, after its deluxe interior was salvaged, less than 20 years after it had been built, the extravagant “cottage” was demolished in 1933. The cost was just too great.

Jesus said to the crowds that had gathered that day, ***anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple... any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.***

Oh, how great is the cost of discipleship. It almost makes us want to give up rather than risk ridicule, or risk failure, or risk battle, or risk heartache, or risk disappointment. It makes us want to jump ahead to what awaits us on the far side of those pearly gates rather than deal with what is expected of us on this side of them. “Give us the crown, Lord! Enough of this cross-bearing stuff, already!”

But Jesus lovingly and knowingly responds, “My dear child, first the cross, then the crown.” And doesn’t he know that better than anyone. For on that terrible day that we call good, it couldn’t have been worse for the son of God and the son of man. Yes, it was on that first Good Friday, on Mt. Calvary, where all hell broke loose. All the ugly power of sin, death, and the devil was unleashed at God’s own sinless Son. All the weight and burden of our guilt was heaped on him and nailed to him on his cross, for him to bear in our place. Faithfulness to the will of his heavenly Father came at the greatest of costs – the Son’s very life. First the cross...

...then the crown. For you see, even as God himself in human flesh was given over to death, you and I were given over to eternal life, given the crown of life assured to us by our risen and ascended Jesus: ***Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.*** (Revelation 2:10) Because of his *cross*, there is a *crown* of life for everyone who trusts in him; that’s what lies ahead for all of Christ’s own; that’s what strengthens us to bear our

crosses in this life so that counting the cost of discipleship becomes nothing more than simply committing yourself to a life lived in thanksgiving for all that Jesus has done for you.

And so, strengthened by Christ himself, we rise to the cost of discipleship. Rather than *risk*, the cost of discipleship becomes *resolve* in the face of ridicule, *faith* in spite of failure, *bravery* in the midst of battle, *wholeness* in the pain of heartbreak, *determination* in throes of disappointment; and yes, *boldness* in this world to build the Kingdom.

In case you’re curious, more can be learned about Twin Cities homes from the so-called gilded age of our nation’s history. Author Larry Mallett’s book *Once There Were Castles* is an entertaining read, filled with lots of pictures of the glittering and golden homes of the fabulously wealthy. But one theme unites them all: None of them are standing today...because, as Jesus puts it, they were the stuff of earth that ***moth and rust destroy*** (Matthew 6:4). And you might argue that all of this cost of cross-bearing will fade away, too, and you would be right. It too, is the stuff of earth.

But this kind of cost of discipleship really isn’t cost at all, is it? No, we call this cost of discipleship earthly stuff only, the same stuff Paul called rubbish in comparison to knowing ***Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing*** in his cross, confident that we can give it all up, follow him, carry our crosses, and one day, by God’s grace, receive the crown. As Peter so boldly wrote, ***though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials...These have come so that your faith-- of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire-- may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade-- kept in heaven for you.*** (1 Peter 1:7,3,4) First the cross, then the crown. In Christ, yours forever. Amen.