**The Revd Canon Liz Hassall, Acting Archdeacon of York, reflects on Luke 14.25-33 for the Twelfth Sunday after Trinity, 7th September.**

Have you ever seen those old-fashioned kitchen scales, where you had a pile of little brass weights to put on one side and weigh against the ingredients? You put your brass weights on one side, then add ingredients to the other to try and make it balance. It’s easy to see which side is heavier, as it plummets to the worktop.

Weighing things out and figuring out the cost is the picture that Jesus gives us in the gospel reading this week from the end of chapter 14 of Luke. Jesus talks about different situations when you count the cost: in a building project, you work out if you can finish it before you start. In a war, you research your enemy’s strength and decide whether you can live with the outcome. If not, you come to terms. It’s easy to understand those situations, but Jesus is not giving advice on building projects or warfare, he is giving a warning over the cost of following him.

Jesus is giving these teachings while surrounded by large crowds. He’s the next big thing – popular, but do these crowds really know what they are getting into? Are they prepared for the potential cost of following Jesus, or are they just along for a good time? They need a challenge, and Jesus gives it to them.

He said “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.” That is a terrifying statement, because we are all dependant at different times of our lives on our families to a greater or lesser extent. Jesus is telling the people listening to him to count the cost of following him. Can they live with the possibility of losing their families? It probably won’t come to that, but they need to consider the possibility that it will. Making the decision to follow Jesus is, in effect, saying you are OK with losing your family.

When I made that decision, I was 15. Being free of the ties of family was something I was aiming for, counting the years until I could leave home and take charge of my own life. It actually wasn’t a big sacrifice to make, it was an exciting adventure, and I was ready for anything. Could I make that same decision now? It would be much harder, but the reality is that at any time in our discipleship there is a chance that we might be called to give up everything for the sake of following Jesus.

When you walk out of the door to go to church, do you consider what you are giving up? Other than a restful Sunday morning in bed? Are you prepared for a walk of discipleship, where sacrifices may be asked of you? Are you prepared to give up your safety, your financial security, your family, your standing in the community? Are you ready to be known as a disciple of Jesus and to be mocked for it by those who are not?

When you put all that on the scales, it looks quite unbalanced. Why would anyone choose that life? Why would anyone risk losing so much? Because, there’s something really important that has been missing so far and it’s this: God loves us. He knows us intimately and loves us more dearly than any human can. When he asks us to give up things for his sake, he does not do it to be awkward, or to hurt us. He does it because of the depth of the love he feels for each of us. He knows what we need in order to follow him.

If you are counting the cost of following Jesus, make sure you know what is on the other side of the balance. Choosing to follow Jesus means choosing to live with God’s love. Greater than we can imagine and it outweighs anything that you could put on the other side.