

This week, we are beginning a sermon series exploring God's economy. Over the next few weeks our gospel texts consider topics like cost, value, investing, and how God's idea of what is precious and pricey rubs up against our everyday assumptions about money and resources. We'll see how the calculus of God's economy is strange, how God's math doesn't always "add up."

From today's text, we see how following God's economy starts with counting the costs.

Jesus presents weighty scenarios to help us know exactly what we're in for, in following Jesus.

The costs of following will be high and costly, like building a tower, like waging a war, like walking out on your family in a society where your family, not the individual, is the basic unit.

You'll want to first sit down and estimate the cost, stop and consider whether what it will take.

So far, this sounds very much like how we would normally consider a cost-benefit analysis.

And in God's economy there are also benefits.

They just might not be the benefits you expect.

By now Jesus and the crowds following him have seen the benefits: miraculous healings of long-term paralytics, abundant feasts where there was nothing before, the alienated being brought close.

Following Jesus, it seems, you very well might build a tower without enough supplies. You very well might win a war with ten thousand fewer people. You very well might find your life, a new life, from losing it.

These benefits go beyond you. They go beyond the individual follower.

The costly decision to build a tower offers protection to the whole city.

The costly war defends the oppressed and creates lasting peace
(or so we Christians always hope).

The costly offering of possessions gets shared with those who have none, outside one's nuclear family.

The costly decision to follow Jesus is a choice we consider and make not only on behalf of ourselves but also on behalf of others. Jesus mentions these things knowing what price he will pay on the cross; that Christ's ultimately, costly decision is for us, on behalf of others, to benefit all.

Now we see how God's economy differs from ours. In God's cost-benefit analysis, we still count the cost, but the benefits are surprising, and they work toward the advantage of the whole community.

Today we're going to hear from two guest speakers who do just that, who count the costs but end up with benefits that advantage the whole community. Kim Hill from the Chesterfield Food Bank and Ginger O'Neil from Richmond Metro Habitat for Humanity know something about the strange calculus of God's economy where the cost and the benefit don't always match up. Their organizations know about serving those who have been priced out of healthy food and affordable housing right here in our county. They have stories of people making costly decisions—giving money and food and goods and time—to benefit the whole community.

Through their stories, we can hear how God's economy remakes our sense of cost and benefit—not how we profit from our investments, but how our investments can change the lives of others for the better.