

Pentecost 13C 04 September 2022  
Luke 14:25-33  
St Peter's Lutheran Church, Elizabeth  
Greg Bensted

Grace and peace to you from God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

*Now large crowds were travelling with [Jesus]; and he turned and said to them, '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. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.... So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.'* Let's pray: .... Amen.

Who still wants to be a disciple of Jesus? Who reckons they've got what it takes? First, "Hate your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself." Second, "Carry the cross and follow [him]." Lastly, "Give up all your possessions." Any takers?

It's that easy and it's that difficult. Jesus' words don't just sound black and white. They are black and white. It's all or nothing. We're either in or we're out. These words probably aren't the first that come to mind when we talk about following Jesus. Separating belief from a way of being and acting is certainly more comfortable, isn't it? Demands and sacrifices aren't so palatable to us.

So, what do we do with today's "good news?" The temptation is to soften the text, to explain it away, to reinterpret it to fit our lives. However, that's just another symptom of the consumerism that infects much of our society, church, and faith.

Too often church and faith are treated like a smorgasbord. We take as much of what we like but leave behind what we don't like, what's too hard to swallow, what we disagree with, or what doesn't fit our personal opinions and beliefs. That's not how the gospels portray Jesus or the life of discipleship.

Sometimes we need to have demands and expectations put on us. Good parents know this. "You have to eat your veges because they're good for you." "You need to do this or that because it's the right thing to do." "You must study hard and do your homework." Parents demand and expect out of love so that their child might grow and thrive. That's what Jesus is doing in today's gospel. His

demands and expectations call us to be like him – fully alive. It's the same choice Moses gave the Israelites; life and prosperity, or death and adversity (Deuteronomy 30:15-20). Jesus is telling the crowd and us, to think of the bigger picture and to expand our thinking beyond our limited temporal lives.

The crowds have been gathering around Jesus since his early ministry. Jesus is the new smorgasbord for them. He offers healing, exorcisms, teaching, hope, life, good news, bread, freedom, and a new vision. He has what they want and they surround and press in on him as though they can't get enough. The crowds grow in number, increasing by the thousands. However, today's gospel changes something. The crowd has moved from gathering around to travelling with, Jesus.

There's more to discipleship, however, than simply travelling with Jesus and grazing from the smorgasbord of divine life. Discipleship is costly. Hate your family and your own life. Carry the cross. Give up your possessions.

Those three things shaped Jesus' own life and ministry. Jesus isn't asking us to do anything he didn't do. On the contrary, Jesus makes it possible for us to do what he did.

So how did Jesus hate his parents? Remember the twelve-year-old Jesus at the temple in Jerusalem? Mary and Joseph are frantic looking for him. They think he's lost. When they find him, Mary asks, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.' He said to them, 'Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house'" (Luke 3:41-50)? In that moment, Jesus sets his relationship with Mary and Joseph below his relationship with God the Father. This isn't the emotional, feeling based way we think of hate today. μισέω [mis-eh'-o] translated as "hate" means "to love someone or something less than someone or something else" or "elevating one value over another" on a comparative basis. So for Jesus, hating is about reordering relationships and loyalty. Jesus isn't rejecting Mary and Joseph or their love. He simply establishes new priorities. For the disciple, nothing can take precedence over their relationship with Jesus; even life itself.

In that sense Jesus hated his own life. He carried his cross and gave precedence to his Father's will and our salvation. Again, it's about priorities. He set aside his will and preferences in favour of love for and obedience to God.

What about Jesus' possessions? "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head," Jesus says (Luke 9:58). Again, Jesus gave primacy to his relationship with God not his relationship with things.

Jesus is asking us to do and be what he did and who he was. That's what a disciple is: a learner, one who learns to live, act, speak, and think like the teacher. The disciple draws the essence of the teacher's life and teachings into his or her own life. (Created in his image).

Absolutely nothing is to take precedence over our relationship with Jesus. Nothing is more important because it's our relationship with Jesus that shapes, defines, determines, and characterises all of our other relationships, all other aspects of our lives, who we are, what we say, and what we do.

Discipleship, learning to live and be like Jesus, is ultimately what unifies our life. So often we live fragmented and compartmentalised lives. We have a work life, school life, family and home life, internet life, recreational life, political and civic life, church life. This fragmentation allows us to place each of those different aspects of our life as the priority depending on where we are, who we're with, and what we're doing. This compartmentalisation is just another symptom of a consumer-oriented, smorgasbord-driven world.

Jesus changes all of that. There can only be one priority that informs and shapes the whole of our lives. This is what some of that looks like:

- It means we're to be the same person with the same values, principles, and beliefs regardless of where we are, who we're with, or what we're doing.
- It means politics is no longer governed by party agendas or loyalty but by commitment to Jesus and gospel agendas.
- It means personal opinions and preferences give way to love of neighbour and one's enemies. Imagine how that one thing would revolutionise social media, our private, and, public conversations.
- It means business isn't a capitalist venture to gain money, power, or leverage, but a way to care for, support, and satisfy human need.
- It means the environment isn't a commodity to be exploited, but a sacred gift entrusted to our care, a beautiful garden in which to walk with God, a place of peace and holiness - a foretaste of heaven.

Saints, it means that everything we think, say, do, and are, arises from our life in and love of Christ. There're costs to be paid and sacrifices to be made. We shouldn't be surprised. We know that's true for other parts of our lives. We sacrifice years of study for an education. We devote decades of our lives to work for a rewarding retirement. We sacrifice time, money, and other opportunities to make sure our children get to experience and enjoy different opportunities. We sacrifice dessert for a healthy diet and sleeping in for ([?] Sorry, but I haven't worked this one out yet. I can't come up with a reason to give up a good lie in). We know how to make sacrifices and pay the cost. We do it because these things are important to us. They're priorities for us. There's nothing wrong with any of them. They're good and important aspects of our lives but we can't avoid the obvious question to which these lead. What are we willing to pay, sacrifice, and give up to follow Jesus?

The answer will be different for each of us but I'm sure each answer will involve reordering our priorities. Learning to be like Jesus isn't just one priority among many; it's to be the only way and it has consequences for our relationships, time, money, work, energy, and effort. No part of our life is left untouched. If we want to know what our priority is, what orients, drives, and directs our life, we need only look at the choices we make, what we choose to say and do, and the ways in which we spend our time, money, and energy. Do we live and act like our Master's apprentices?

There's a reason biblical scholars call today's gospel one of Jesus' "hard sayings." It offers challenging words and raises difficult questions. But, they're words and questions that offer life. Real, authentic, God-pleasing life. We want to be like Jesus and we know there's more to life than our earthly existence. Don't let the text scare you. We can do these things because Christ has made it possible. He's lived our lives, he's borne our pain, and he's won our salvation. Let's not lose the power and gift of his words. Let's continue to practise the craft of love, life, and devotion following the way of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, and carry our crosses all the way to heaven, to the glory of God, our Father. Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.