Sermon | Proper 18C

TEXT: Luke 14:25-35

4 September 2016

Discipleship under the Cross

*In the Name of +Jesus. Amen.*

 Dear saints,

There are some Sundays where it’s easy for me as the pastor, and for you as the people, after the Holy Gospel is read, to have that little exchange right there: “This is the Gospel of the Lord. *Thanks be to God*.” But there are other Sundays, we get a text that makes it a lot harder to have that exchange. Because the words of Jesus are difficult, maybe even shocking and unsettling to us. This is one of those Sundays.

Did you hear what Jesus said in this morning’s Gospel?

Verse 26: *If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.*

Verse 27: *Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.*

Verse 33: *Any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.*

This is the Gospel of the Lord? Thanks be to God? Really? This is the Gospel?

Doesn’t seem very Gospel-y to me. Hating family? Bearing the cross? Renouncing all that we have? I thought Jesus was all about families! Isn’t Jesus at work, when let’s say, husband sins against wife, son sins against father, or brother sins against brother, and there’s forgiveness, reconciliation, and peace? Isn’t that Christ’s work? To fix broken families? To heal hurting relationships? To take people who were separated from one another because of sin, and bring them up together through the forgiveness that Jesus himself brings into the world?

What is Jesus on about?

And, how many places in the Bible are we commanded to *love* our families?

Jesus’ general command to love everyone: *Love one another, as I have loved you.* [Jn. 13:34]

Or, the command to love our parents: *honor your father and your mother,* 4th Commandment.

Or, the command to love our spouses: *husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church. Wives, submit to your husbands, as to the Lord.* [Eph. 5:22ff.]

Or, the command to love our children: *fathers, bring up [your children] in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.* [Eph. 6:4]

I thought the Lord was all about love, loving our families, as the very people God has put into our lives for us to love and serve in our vocation. So what could Jesus mean by these words—that we should hate our families, hate our very lives, renounce all that we have, and bear the cross?

It would help us to have a little context, and understand that, as Jesus is saying these words, he’s going somewhere. He’s on a journey. And where is Jesus headed? Jesus is headed to Jerusalem, to the cross, to his death, to give his life for the life of the world. [Lk. 9:51; 14:25]

And so, these words of Jesus are all about discipleship. They’re all about following him. This is Jesus’ invitation to you and to me to go with him. This is Jesus saying, “Come with me, come with me to the cross, come with me to my death. Come, and die with me, that you may rise to new life with me.”

Because you see, that’s what discipleship is. Discipleship means dying with Jesus, and rising with Jesus. **Discipleship means sharing with Jesus in his death and resurrection**.

And so, what Jesus talks about hating family, hating our very lives, about bearing the cross, and renouncing all that we have, this is our Lords way of saying: anything that stands in the way of following him—whatever that thing is: it could be your money, it could be your job, it could be a habit or addiction, it could be your friends, it could even be your family—whatever that thing is that stands in the way of following Jesus, you have to let it go, renounce it, repent of it, yes, even die to it.

Because even the good gifts of God can become our idols, if we begin to worship them and give our hearts to them as if they were God.

But Christ wants every part of us. Not just an hour of our time on Sunday. Not just ten minutes of our time each day in family devotions. But all of you, every part of you, the whole package. He wants our hearts, our souls, and our minds totally committed to fearing, loving, trusting him alone. That's why the path of discipleship is to die to anything that impedes that total commitment to Christ.

Of course, that's a tall order. Total commitment to Jesus alone is hard. Discipleship, following Jesus, is hard. That's why the Lord's Words this morning are so jarring. Because he wants us to take a long, hard look at what it will cost you. He doesn’t want us to think that being a Christian will be a cakewalk. Sometimes, our crosses are heavy, and commitment to Christ will hurt.

That's why Jesus says, count the cost. He gives these two examples, [vv.28-32]. You would never lay a foundation without counting the cost of the whole building project, or you'll be left with an unfinished building. And folks will laugh at you. In the same way, you would never go to war without counting the strength of your enemy, or you'd go to battle and lose the war. So count the cost of being a disciple. What'll it cost you? What's the price you will pay for following Jesus?

The answer is everything. Your whole life. All that you are, and all that you have, turned over to him. But who can pay that price? To renounce everything and follow Jesus only? Not you, not I. It is too much for us. We don't have the strength.

And so, in the end, it's Jesus, and his discipleship, that is to say, his total commitment to the Father in heaven that saves us. And when we consider Jesus, how he gave up all that he had, how he bore the cross willingly and suffered many things, how he turned his back to all temptations and earthly pleasures and trod the path of perfect obedience that led to his death for the sins of the world—when we consider Jesus, that is where we find the perfect disciple. Jesus really was totally committed to the will of his Father, and he really was totally committed to you, to earning your salvation. And it's by his commitment to us that we are justified and saved. Faith looks to Christ and trusts in him, and not ourselves.

And so, in the end, does Jesus want us to love family? Without a doubt. And not only is it his command for husbands to love their wives, for wives to love their husbands, and for parents to love their children, he delights in it. Christ delights in it when there is reconciliation in our homes; when one person sins against another, and forgiveness is spoken, and peace is made; when we love one another with the same selfless, sacrificial love by which he loved us.

This is the only difference: we are never to love anyone or anything as if that person or thing was God. But here's the great paradox: it's those who trust in Christ alone for salvation who love their families best, because by faith, they know what love means: taking up our cross and bearing the burden of another, even as he bore the cross for us. The love of Christ's disciples is patterned and shaped by his love for them and the world.

And so, may the Holy Spirit sanctify us by his grace, that we may learn to die to ourselves, to our idols and to all the world, and awaken to a new life filled with faith in Jesus, and love for our neighbor. Amen.

*In the Name of the Father and of the +Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*