

Sermon – 13th Sunday After Pentecost

Luke 14:25-35

September 8, 2019

“Family...Matters”

A New Testament scholar by the name of F.F. Bruce wrote a book entitled *“The Hard Sayings of Jesus.”* His 266-page work according to the online the summary was written to *“examine 70 sayings of Jesus that are hard to understand or apply and clear away the difficulties that keep modern readers from grappling with the real challenge of Jesus’ message.”* This seems to imply ancient hearers were spellbound by someone telling them to hate their families and go begging for a Roman cross to “take up.” As you know online sites often direct you to companion works of featured authors – so I was hoping Mr. Bruce might have penned one entitled *“The Easy Sayings of Jesus.”* He apparently hasn’t gotten around to that. So, I Googled the phrase – and nothing came up. I’ve never had that happen to me before!

Well, yes, Luke 14:26 is what you might call a “hard saying.” But alas “modern reader” - ancient hearers would’ve wondered aplenty about what to make of a statement like *“anyone who comes to me and does not hate (their family members) cannot be my disciple.”* Good luck starting a movement with that! Did these very same folks not sit on a grassy mount in Galilee and hear Jesus say; *“love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you?”* If you’re supposed to love those who (might) abuse and steal from you, why not the ones who nursed and provided for you?

Moreover, in that very same ‘sermon on the mount’ Jesus said that he’d come not to abolish the commandments but to fulfill them – all except *“honor your father and your mother”* perhaps? We must read this “hard” passage straight up – but also in context. It challenges, even offends, but it serves an important purpose. All our passages today concern commitment even I dare say, a “decision” about how we’re going to live. Deuteronomy 30:19 says as much even if our Lutheran sensibilities recoil in hearing the word “choose.” It’s call to allegiance to God is no more than a restatement of the First Commandment however and is intended to bring about the welfare of families. *“Now choose life, so that you and your children may live.”*

Psalm 1 says (to folks inclined to meditate on God’s word 24/7) that they will be like trees planted by a spring of water – not dried up weeds blown away by a modest wind. Lots of promise in this Psalm, but it calls for a decision – the law of the Lord OR the way of sinners. Not a whiff of middle ground anywhere – you can’t simply sprinkle a spiritual desert with good intentions and get anything to grow.

Our lesson from Philemon calls for a difficult moral, even financial choice from a believer. Paul presented Christ to a man named Philemon and, evidently in the process, Philemon's slave Onesimus. Later Paul asks slave owner to put away his legal rights and financial investment and embrace slave Onesimus as a brother in Christ, in whom Paul once said; "there is no slave or free, all are one." In so many words, *'I tell you the truth anyone who does not take a dramatically new posture toward his servants...cannot be mine.'*

These words of Jesus about family are followed by his oft stated phrase *"take up your cross and follow."* In popular imagination we think of a cross to bear as a less than fulfilling job or our macular degeneration or a recent, offensive anti-Christian post we just had to – with outrage – re-tweet to show how bad things are getting for believers. Unfortunately, such an understanding reduces Jesus image of cross-bearing to something unfortunate that happens to us, instead of the change Jesus wills take place within us – even I say again, a lifestyle that is chosen by us. Such a life would show forth a desire to "hate" any ways of life that mitigate, mask, or smother the Christ that chose to live in us. That phrase means letting servanthood be the foundation of your life - your response to terms of peace from a King whose coronation was on a cross.

No, Rally Sunday worshippers, Jesus does not want you to hate anyone – particularly in his name. He wants you to love them in such a way that is only possible if you love Jesus utterly. He wants you to give that thought however – serious, reflective, calculative thought on what would be different in you but also between you and your family if Jesus was your first love.

What would it be like if, with Jesus your foundation – a forgiver that is, you made peace with God and accepted his terms for your family, your career, your finances? Perhaps Jesus words are not as hard as we think. The paradox of faith is that those who lose their lives in Jesus find them returned to them in abundance. Perhaps those who "hate" their families in order to love Jesus will end up loving their families in a more profound, deeper, and certainly more sacrificial way. The path to love is a cross – a hard reality indeed.

But please, remember it is your salvation that Jesus, when all was said and done loved his father above all else – his delight was in the law of the Lord above all else – even if not especially the parts that condemn human sin and would soon condemn him to his cross. It is your salvation that Jesus chose the cross so that you and your children could claim his as yours – and live. It is your salvation that Jesus considers you not a slave but as his own flesh and blood – brothers and sisters whom he loves more than life itself. That may be a hard thing to believe – but something I hope you do. AMEN