

Sept. 9th Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Luke 14:25-33

Jesus said to the great multitudes that followed him, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters...and even his own life, **HE CANNOT BE MY DISCIPLE.**”

I asked my wife, Chrishelle, what she thought of this passage and the first word out of her mouth was “harsh.” I then asked her if she wanted to be a disciple, she look at me kind of funny and said “not under those conditions.”

Jesus’ words today do seem rather harsh and even a bit surprising.

Is this the same Jesus, who told his disciples to love the Lord with all their heart and to love their neighbor as themselves? Is this the same Jesus, who taught his disciples that the best response to violence is to turn the other cheek?

For most of us, those are teachings we can get behind, we can accept them, but today Jesus seems to have taken it just a little bit too far. So far, in fact that he seems to contradict many of his other more memorable teachings.

For in this passage Jesus appears to be requiring his disciples to HATE, Hate their fathers and their mothers, to hate their wives and children, brother and sisters. And even to hate their own lives.

Hate is such a loaded word. It conjures up deep emotions within us. It stirs us at an almost primitive level so much so that we can feel hatred physically. Now I'm not a psychologist or psychiatrist, but I imagine when someone seethes with hatred something chemically is going on in his body.

I'm sure as hatred is conjured up hormones and chemicals are released into the blood stream as the body gets ready to react to a perceived physical threat. Fight or Flight.

Hate is powerful. It causes violence, anger, and rage.

Hate caused nineteen terrorists to hijack four airplanes and fly them loaded with people into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon and into the ground here in Pennsylvania.

And here this morning we are faced with a passage in which Christ appears to be telling his followers if they are to be his disciples they are to HATE... Hate their lives, their families and their possessions.

Remember however that this passage originated some two thousand years ago. The word that the gospel writer uses for hate has a very different meaning than the way in which you and I understand the meaning of hate. The English language in some way does this lesson quite a disservice.

Biblical scholar and preacher Fred Craddock explains “To hate is a Semitic expression meaning to turn away from, to detach oneself from.” He writes further, “There is nothing of that emotion we experience in the expression ‘I hate you’.”

Essentially hate in the biblical context then means to turn away from. To be Christ’ disciples his follower must for a time turn from those things that might distract them from learning to be his disciples.

Some of us know about this process quite well, some of you have recently and many of you in the past sent your children off to college or off to join the military. Off to some place where they could learn often away from the protection of parents and family.

Learn not only in the technical sense of getting and education about business or how to be a teacher, or how to be a soldier, but also learning about how to be a responsible adult.

A few years ago as my call to ordained ministry began to unfold and it became apparent that I was going to begin the process of becoming a priest, Chrishelle and I needed to begin to tell family and friends about our plans. This was a nerve wracking time for us, as we were not sure how family and friends would react to the news.

Although most were supportive, we did experience a few rather odd responses. When talking to my sister she mistook me saying something about priesthood for me saying that I had decided to become a prostitute. Chrishelle's cousin's response however was also very interesting. After Chrishelle told her cousin of our plans, Sarah with a very serious look on her face asked Chrishelle if I would still like baseball.

Somehow, in Sarah's mind the following of my call into this vocation meant that I would have to voluntarily renounce many of things that I enjoy. And for those who think that we, priests have little or no fun let me just tell you I still drink beer, play poker, and watch baseball.

However, Jesus' call into a life of discipleship does at times mean turning away from some things. Discipleship costs something. Those in the crowd who were following Christ that day would have to turn away from a few things, if they were going to be Christ disciples.

Most of the followers would decide that the price was too high and drop out, but a few would decide to turn away from those things that held them back, held them back from living more fully into a life of discipleship.

Each of us turned away from something to be here this morning.

Some of us turned away from our pillows and our beds to be here.

Others of us turned away from a nice cup of coffee, the recliner, and the Sunday paper in order to be here.

And a few of us turned away a perfectly nice time to play golf in order to be here.

In our turning away, we have taken a step in discipleship. We have taken time away to hear from God's word, to be nourished from the Holy Eucharist and to spend time in corporate prayer.

However, in a few short moments each of us will turn back to the world we left behind so that we might continue those activities that we turned away from. However, we will turn back differently. We will turn back with a different perspective, a perspective as one who has walked with the Lord, as one who has learned from Jesus' teachings.

One who will now take that perspective out onto the golf course and maybe just look at that missed shot just a little bit differently. We will take that perspective back to the recliner and Sunday paper and look at the world perhaps just a bit more as Christ sees it.

And maybe when we crawl into bed this afternoon for a little nap we will sleep just a little more peacefully knowing that we have rested this morning in arms of our Lord.

Our challenge as disciples is and will continue to be to at times to turn away from the things that distract us, in order to spend time walking and following Christ outside of Sunday morning.

I'm not sure what that looks like for you it might mean spending a few moments each morning being quiet and centering yourself. It might mean finding some time to open up the bible and read a passage. It might mean reciting the Lord's Prayer while sitting at a traffic light. Only you can decide what that might look like for you.

Just know that in your turning away, you will encounter Christ and when you turn back you will not turn back alone but you will bring Christ back into world with you. AMEN.

