

Luke 14:25-33

Now large crowds were traveling 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. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions."

Well, here we are at one of those tough Gospel passages that so often seem to leave people stunned and confused. You know what I mean, right?

I would love to conduct a survey after people hear this passage. I would give them a list of words and ask them to circle which one sticks out in their mind most. I have a pretty good idea about which one would get the highest mark; about which word would be the most memorable. I know which word I get the most questions about. So, which word do you all think would be the one?

(Congregation responds)

That right. Hate. Not only is it a powerful word in the context of our culture, but in our passage it is directed at some of our most beloved people. It is directed at mothers and fathers, and sisters and brothers, wives and children. How can Jesus be telling us that we should hate these people? This is the exact kind of passage that non-believers pull out for our millennials to hear in order to drive them away from the church. "Welcome to the Church. Now go home and hate your whole family. Praise be to God!" Now, doesn't that sound like a great PR campaign?

So, you can probably understand it when I say that I think that Jesus is talking about something else. This can't be the same thing that we think of when we say hate in our society today.

So, what is it? Well, for Jesus, he was talking about setting a priority to things. Hate, in his context, was to set the object of your "hate" simply in a lower position of priority in

relationship, in this case, to God. But most people, quite honestly, get trapped in the first verse, the hate verse, and hear very little of the rest.

Here are some other words that come to my mind for our survey list. They may not be used directly in the passage, but they're there between the lines. I wonder if you heard any of these?

How about the word commitment? Did that word spring to your mind? How about sacrifice? Did you hear anything about sacrifice? How about the word preparation? How about disciple? That one was actually in the passage. Is Jesus talking about any of these?

To be honest, I think that he is talking about all of these. The one thing that he is definitely not talking about is hate, as we perceive it.

Put yourselves in the context of the passage. Jesus had just eaten dinner at a Pharisee's house. He was surrounded by Scribes and leaders of the Temple. He asked them about healing on the Sabbath. Not getting a response, he healed a man with dropsy. Then he told them a parable. The parable was about humility. We heard it last week. And he also taught in the same parable about not expecting anything in return for our generosity. There was a bigger reward waiting in heaven.

Telling another parable, one we didn't hear this lectionary cycle. He taught them about how a man had planned a banquet and invited many people. They all "RSVPed" that they would be there. When the time came for the banquet, for the celebration, everyone who had said they would be there had some excuse. One said that he had bought a field and had to tend to it. Another had bought some oxen and he had to go and look them over. A third had just gotten married and, well, he couldn't come either. One thing after another. One excuse for not being able to be part of the banquet after another. It wasn't that these were bad excuses. It was a matter of priority.

So, the man giving the banquet instructed his people to go out into the street and invite everyone they see. And the celebration filled with humble and grateful people instead of all those who had other, more important, distractions.

And now, in the passage for this Sunday, Jesus was on the road leading out of town. He had a lot of people coming along, and he turns to them and says, "Hey! Listen up! I need you all to understand something. If you don't put your mothers and fathers, wives and children, sisters and brothers in a lower priority to what we are doing here, to what God is doing here, then go home. You cannot be called my disciples."

"If you are not willing to commit to what we are doing and take up your cross, as I am going to take up mine, then sleep in. There is no need to set the alarm. You cannot be called my disciples."

“There is a cost and a sacrifice to what we are doing here. If you are not willing to bear that cost, if you are not willing to make that sacrifice, then you cannot be called my disciples.”

“You see people, we are building something here. We are building something for all time. This is not a day at trip to Dollywood. You need to, right now, measure the cost of our lifelong and life-changing project, and if you don’t have enough within you to commit to and complete the whole project, then take up another, less consuming hobby. Don’t commit to building just a foundation of the tower and not have the will and strength to finish it all. If you don’t commit and finish, people will laugh at you, and us, and then will reject our whole salvation movement.”

“We’re in a battle here,” he continued. “It is a battle for the soul of the world. I don’t need followers. I need disciples. I don’t need enthusiasts. I need disciples. I don’t need people who are going to sue for peace with our enemy even if they are facing grave odds. I need faithful disciples, sacred partners, that are committed, and sure, and trusting that God has this handled. I need disciples who are willing to lay everything else aside and join something that is beyond their comprehension. If that is you, then come with me.”

It was a powerful message back then and people needed to hear it. It is a powerful message for us today, and we need to hear it also.

What would Jesus say to his church today? Maybe he would say, “I am not looking for members. I am not looking for consumers looking to be served. I am looking for disciples to carry forth the Good News of salvation. I am looking for disciples who are willing to serve others.”

He might go on and say, “I am not looking for hobbyists who will seek out God’s banquet so long as they haven’t bought a new piece of land, or a new ox, or have a new wife, or a new car. I am not looking for fans who will attend church so long as they like the Rector, they serve the right donuts at coffee hour, have the right people in the pews, and offer a good mix of social opportunities. I am not looking for enthusiasts who have a quick answer for others who ask what church they attend, but couldn’t for the life of them tell you what was discussed in Sunday school. I am looking for disciples, partners in a sacred mission. People who are willing to commit to Jesus Christ for the sake of His mission for the world.”

He might conclude by saying that he is looking for disciples who are willing to put the things of the world into their proper priority, and then to sacrificially take up their cross and committing to pay the price in order to finish the project of defeating all those forces that come against God and all His children in His creation.

What it sounds like to me is a passage about great love, not hate. What do you think?

Amen