

Proper 18 Year C

“Whoever comes to me and does not hate father, mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes even life itself, cannot be my disciples.”

How’s that for evangelism?...We could use it as a stewardship theme this Fall.... What on earth is going on in this passage? What is Jesus telling us through the pen of Luke? This is one of the so-called hard sayings that many preachers choose to avoid altogether....a great Sunday to preach on Paul perhaps; but several of the last few passages in Luke have been difficult, and I think we have to stick with him and listen to what Luke is saying to us....Luke is bearing down on the reality, the terse reality, that God’s kingdom does not conform to the norms of our world....that God’s perspective differs from the perspective of a world enslaved to violence and envy.....perspective.....God’s perspective is what I think this passage is about.

A story about perspective, some of y’all have heard me tell this before: Katharine and I, and both of our fathers and my grandfather grew up in Dothan, Al. We raised our three children there as well. None of us other than when in college had lived anywhere else....our roots ran deep into this small south Alabama town....the peanut festival....high school football....the nearby gulf coast...old friends...we were happy there. When it came time to leave for seminary, my stomach was in a knot....my

business, our house, sold....At sunrise, our leaving become imminent, we loaded the cars methodically. No one was saying a word....my mother, Katharine, James, Rhett and Katie...Katie who would travel to Texas with us....James was headed back to Sewanee...Rhett we decided could stay with his grandmother in Dothan and finish his senior year..... When the cars were packed, it was then time to say good-by....good-by to a life.....the gut wrenching moment I had been dreading for months....we all stood in my mother's driveway and hugged and wept....and as we pulled away, headed for this brave and vast new world called Texas...I looked in my rearview mirror one last time....there, my own flesh and blood left behind....our call that had led us to this point became pure and simple.....I could hear my own voice saying, "Jim, your call is to just drive west!" pure and simple....perspective.

In our passage today Jesus is helping his would be disciples to reorient their way of thinking...he is trying to put this ministry of his and the ministry of his followers into its proper perspective. Now Luke, the writer, is using hyperbole to make the point. Jesus of course, would never really require us to hate anything...he even demanded that we love our enemies....he unequivocally preached about a commonweal wherein love reigns supreme...so what's the deal here? Now I say that Luke is using

hyperbole, but these words spoken by Jesus also appear in Matthew and Mark thereby raising the likelihood that Jesus might have actually said these shocking words.....words I hate to hear....words I would rather ignore...Hate your family, hate your possessions, hate your very own life, if you wish to follow me....hard words.

In hearing these words, the community of Luke, a Jewish Christian community, would remember a very similar passage in Exodus, a passage to which Luke is alludingMoses is moving about the Israelite camp exhorting them to the coming battle with their rivals which has become imminent. He begins to test the loyalty of his troops...he says unless you hate your brother, your neighbor, your mother and father...you are not worthy of battle....some of the men actually go out and slaughter members of their families to prove their loyalty....now this is Hebrew literature in the genre of legend....a legend well known to any Jew worth his or her salt, certainly known to Luke....So here is Jesus, just as Moses did before, Jesus in the line of the prophets, a recurring theme in this Gospel, Jesus calling on the unconditional loyalty of those who would follow him....because the battle with the powers and principalities of our world is formidable and imminent...as imminent as sunrise, as imminent as good-by....it comes as we speak....and it is time for perspective....a new perspective of loyalty.

Jesus lays on the table all the things we hold sacred in our world...our families, our friends, our possessions...our very lives; and he tells us in love that none of these things can have the final say...the thing that has the final say is God's goodness that breaks into our world...and here is the important point...Jesus is purely and simply getting our attention...he is not saying that these things we hold so dear are bad: With no familial love we fail to thrive...without financial means we become vulnerable and stricken...and our very lives are sacred gifts from God...What Jesus is saying to us is that those things...our sacred things must themselves serve and give way to the greater good, which is God's commonweal in earth in which mercy, compassion and justice reign...in which all are equals in mutual dignity...these things to which we hold fast are not ends in themselves...but they are the things with which we strive for the good of God's commonweal, the new perspective of life in earth...He is purely and simply saying it in a way that surely gets our attention...Jesus' ministry would have failed without his family and friends...it would have failed without generous benefactors...but what is important here is that we must be set free from the things of this world as ends unto themselves, and we must love more, love more our call to discipleship, as gut wrenching as it can be. Looking at things the way they really are can be gut wrenching.

In a mysterious sort of way the abundance of God's kingdom can be glimpsed between the lines.....In truth we don't ever give up the things dear to us....we give up the power they hold over us...and are thereby set free to become passionate people for the beautiful new order that waits to be born...an order, a re-orientation...a new perspective in which compassion and generosity, a new order in which mercy, peace and justice reign supreme....but this will only be so when we are willing to give up everything that has a hold on us...to say a tearful good-bye to them... so that they no longer have power over us that would prevent us.... But still, this is a hard thing that Jesus is asking.... until we swear our ultimate allegiance to the Christ, putting all else in submission to the Christ, who lives and moves among us, and the kingdom he proclaims, and the movement he represents, we will never be fully whole...and joy will forever remain fleeting...because we are a species made for one purpose, and that is to seek and enact this greater good....for ourselves and for our world.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us have the courage to say good-bye to the power that the things we love in our world hold over us...let us claim the freedom to serve our God and the good of the new creation wherein the perspective is one of loving sacrifice....a new life where there is forgiveness and mercy and compassion.....a new sweetly abundant life in

which the things we love most in our world are not lost, but are enriched by a love more profound....a love that is active and purposeful in our world....a love that reorders the cosmic perspective entire....a love that bids good-by to the lostness of our world....a love that bids us welcome home where our roots are deep.....home again, as if we never had to say good-by..... a new perspective, pure and simple.