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 Pentecost 15
 All Saints Episcopal Church

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.

In the name of the God who gives us strength, who gives us courage, and who gives us freedom. Amen.

So...whoever comes to me and does not hate...have I misread that? Can that be the word Jesus meant to use? Hate? Really? Aren't we supposed to LOVE one another? Isn't that commandment to HONOR your father and mother? Aren't we even supposed to love OURSELVES?

I don't want to hate my family! Oh, sure, sometimes one of them aggravates me, but that is temporary. I really...really...love my family. What am I supposed to do? Why do I have to hate everyone in order to be a disciple of Jesus?

Obviously, Jesus must be saying all that to get everyone's attention, don't you think? He is exaggerating to make a point.

Well, let's look at a few things behind the scenes. First of all, the word, "hate." The Greek word does mean to hate, but, like many words, it has additional meanings as well. And the alternative meaning for this word is "to be disinclined toward." To be unwilling, to be opposed, to be averse...similar in some ways, different in some ways, but nothing so harsh as to hate.

What Jesus is talking about is all those things that have power over us...that keep us from putting God first. In *The Message*, a contemporary translation, Jesus says, "Anyone who comes to me but refuses to let go of father, mother, spouse, children, brothers, sisters - yes, even one's own self! - can't be my disciple. That seems quite a bit different to me than hate! Don't hate your father, mother, spouse, children, etc., or even yourself. But also don't let father, mother, spouse, children, self hold on so tight to you that you cannot re-order your priorities...so that you cannot put God first!

At the end of today's passage we read, "So, therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions." Another incredibly harsh statement, but not as surprising as the first one. And not so much of a surprise, either, because we've heard Jesus say it before. "Go, sell everything you have, and follow me." But again, we can turn to *The Message* to hear another possible

translation: "Simply put, if you're not willing to take what is dearest to you, whether plans or people, and kiss it good-bye, you can't be my disciple." Take what is dearest to you - plans or people - and kiss it good-bye.

What is it that you cannot let go of? What has power or control over you? What is dearest to you? What do you need to be disinclined toward in order to make God your first priority?

Let's start with things - it's easier to think objectively about letting go of them. What sorts of things have control over you? For an incredible number of people these days, this -- (take cell phone out of pocket) - this cell phone has perhaps the tightest grip possible. The average teenager texts about 3000 times a month. 3000. This is why the 'unlimited texting plan' was invented. But before you go off on your son or daughter, consider this recent survey result: around two-thirds of adults sleep with their cell phones on the bedside table or IN THE BED with them! Two-thirds!

Why do we need to be able to answer the phone in the middle of the night? All of my midnight calls are wrong numbers - wouldn't it be smarter of me to leave the phone in the kitchen or the laundry room so I couldn't hear it and wouldn't have to wake up for a wrong number?

And here's no surprise: 86% of you think it's rude for ME to repeatedly check my cell out during a meeting or a conversation, but it's fine if YOU do it! And do we really need to carry on phone conversations in public restrooms? I don't want to hear about what you just bought at Target or the sale at Dillard's. And we know - which is not funny at all - about the dangers of texting or just talking on the phone while driving. Being unwilling to be disinclined toward cell phone use in a car can make you inclined toward being killed, or killing someone else.

There are things that I am particularly attached to, and might find it hard to let go of: my laptop is one and the tv is another. I read particular blogs and play particular games and watch particular tv shows. If I don't get to read, play or see those things when I am expecting to, I can become annoyed. Really! Imagine something like that having control over me!

Now I'm not going to give you a run-down on all the faults on my list. I'm sure you have your own list, and I won't comment on it unless you ask me to. But I will ask you to think about what might be on your list. Cell phones? TVs? Cars? Golf clubs? Sewing machines? Tennis rackets? Bikes? Shoes?

So let's move on to plans and people - tougher to discuss, tougher to let go of, to be disinclined toward.

We all have plans. When I grow up, I want to get married and live in a big house and have 2.5 children. I want to have a good job and make lots of money and drive a nice car. I'd bet we all have or have had some version of this plan for our lives. Have you achieved any or all of it? I hope so.

But do your plans (including the people involved) have a hold on you? Do they control you? Have power over you? Do they hold on to you so tightly that they are your top priorities even if you want to rearrange the order? Now I'm not talking about control in an evil, Stephen King movie sort of way. I'm talking about being consumed with our plans, consumed with our families, consumed with our selves - it really is all about us, isn't it? We are wearing special glasses with an AAM coating - "All About Me" --able only to see things that concern us.

How do we let go of all this enough to make God our number one priority? I say 'enough', because I don't think we are called to get rid of our plans or our families, or even our cell phones. We are called instead to turn our attention outwards, to include people and things beyond our narrow field of vision also. Of course, if we don't WANT to change our priorities, it doesn't make any difference. But if we are going to call ourselves Christians and mean it, we have to consider what Jesus said is necessary to be disciples.

Tom Ehrich, a columnist for Religious News Service, recently wrote about the way forward that Jesus offers us as individuals, as a country and as Christians. He said, *People in [Jesus'] era, as in ours, were distracted, seeking escape, wanting easy answers, fearful of change, hungry for wealth and power, blaming foreigners and strangers, pulling inward, and willing to give up their freedom to the strong-willed.*

Jesus' answer was clear, albeit threatening. Love me first, he said. Love your God before all others. Love your neighbor before yourself. Don't baptize your desired way of life and call it holy, but conform your life to the true holiness of God. Seek the courage not to be afraid.

It is threatening to us when we are asked to change. Jesus' way is upside down from what the world tells us to do. We are afraid. Love me first, he says. Don't baptize your desired way of life and call it holy. But we don't have to give up our families, our spouses, our children, our parents, our siblings, or even our selves. When we conform our lives to the true holiness of God, we find our lives fulfilled beyond our own imaginations...we find that, instead of being turned into some kind

of religious nut case (if that's what you're worried about - we are Episcopalians, after all - we have standards)...we find that we are given a much larger family...a family that supports us, loves us, encourages us to be everything we are created to be... more family for us to love and support...more family that we are given the grace to see become everything they are created to be.

To borrow a phrase from another All Saints Church, our call is to transform the human race into the human family (*borrowed from All Saints, Pasadena*). We can do it. Don't be afraid. Just look around. What an exciting way forward for us all!
Amen.