



“Choices”

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost
5:30 p.m. Saturday, September 3, 2016
The Reverend John H. Brock
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Luke 14:25-33

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

Do you remember our gospel reading from a few weeks ago, the one where Jesus talking about his followers would divide their families, fathers against sons, daughters against mothers, mother-in-laws against daughter-in-laws?

Or how about the parable about the guy who had an abundant harvest, and instead of sharing the excess, or even selling it off, he chose to keep it all for himself, build bigger barns, and ending up dying because of his lack of compassion towards God?

And how about the unproductive fig tree? Where it hadn't produced any figs for three years, and the owner said cut it down? And then the gardener says, give me one more year, I'll fertilize it, and water it, and give it special attention, and if it *Still* doesn't produce, **then** I'll cut it down.

Those are all pretty . . . let's call them, harsh. Yet during those same time periods, Jesus *also* talks about how blessed Mary is, because she is sitting and listening to Jesus, while her sister Martha is running around, getting dinner ready, not really paying attention to what Jesus is saying. Or how he healed a woman on the Sabbath who had been crippled for eighteen years. Or just last week, when Jesus reminds us that true humility is a wonderful practice to undertake. We get these seemingly diametrically opposed concepts: Grace verses Division; Love verses punishment. And yet, the lesson that we are presented today fits in so well with that seeming imbalance.

Our lesson starts off with this nearly absurd statement from Jesus:

²⁶ *"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.*

Wow. This is almost beyond that whole *"I have come not to bring peace, but division"* from just a couple of weeks ago.

But here's something we have to keep in mind. That word that is translated as "hate" - *miseo*. While that is an accurate translation of the Greek word, it's the *concept* that we need to touch on. Because in Hebrew (yes, I know the gospel was written in Greek, but the author was writing about Hebrews), often times two things would be contrasted, so as to get that idea of "greater" verses "lesser."

So another way of looking at this passage would be:

*“Anyone who does not **love me more than they love** father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.”*

That makes it a little easier to understand for our 21st Century North American ears, doesn't it?

Because Jesus is striving to get across the simple fact that being his disciple, being his follower, wanting to live as he directs us to, will come with a cost. Now remember, Jesus is saying all these things while he's on his way to Jerusalem to die, so we have to understand he is in a certain mind set. Still, the guy is making a point here.

And he continues with some, I think, rather insightful illustrations, something that the folks of his day would understand. Bear in mind that Israel is an occupied nation. The Roman Empire has been there for at least a century, and the Greeks were there before the Romans. So the people understand military references. While the first example of building a tower may not resonate with his hearers, they can understand the financial and war machine reference of the second example, and it is one that they should be able to comprehend.

So maybe no one here is going to build a tower. But you might build a deck. Or maybe you want to remodel your kitchen. Are you going to start one of those projects without a budget? Are you going to design your perfect dining place, and not figure out the difference between what you want and what you can afford? Jesus makes I think a fairly solid point here:

³³ So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

But it makes me wonder: after hearing all this; Not only what we heard tonight, but in the previous weeks, the divisions, the harsh judgements, the disruption of family, I have to wonder, first, how many of that "large crowds were traveling with him" remained with him after hearing this "hate your family"? Even more so, there is a cost, there is a **high** cost, to discipleship. That's what Jesus is saying here. to be his follower - there is a choice. and they are not easy choices.

The waters of our baptism call us to follow Christ. Our baptism calls us to be a disciple. We can choose to reject that. We can choose to turn our backs on Christ, ignore that persistent voice in our ear that tug in our hearts. That's a choice we all have.

Or, we can choose to be a friend to the new kid in class. To strive to not lose our temper at that idiot in the Honda who just cut me off. To help out the overwhelmed co-worker, who is dealing with an ailing parent and child home from school. We can choose to spend time in prayer, even if it's in the shower, in the parking lot, or during lunch hour.

We are, none of us, ever going to be perfect in our faith. But I'm not convinced that Christ is looking for perfection. I think Christ is looking for those who are doing the best they can, those who are reaching out in his name, to help those in need, to feed those who have no food, to help those who cannot help themselves - to be God's hands in this world.

Those are some of the choices we are faced with: Serving God; Serving self. Now it's up to us to choose.

Amen.

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