

*St. John Lutheran Church*

*The Sermon*

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September 4, 2022

Luke 14:25-33

I have to tell you right now, I don't like this gospel lesson for today. If I was the one who chose the Bible passages for each Sunday, I would not choose this one for this Sunday. In fact, I might let this Bible passage wait for a very long time before I chose it.

Fortunately, I am not the one who chooses the Bible passages for each Sunday. Almost all the time, we follow what is called the Revised Common Lectionary. The Revised Common Lectionary is a three-year cycle that covers about a third of the Hebrew Scriptures and two-thirds of the New Testament. Usually, we follow the passages that are chosen for each Sunday, because then we actually do read the passages that make us feel uncomfortable, that we don't like.

In the gospel lesson for today, Jesus says, "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. I am going to have to spend the whole sermon explaining this passage, with no time for stories. What kind of fun is that?

So, here are three details about this passage from which I would like to explore what it means for us.

First detail: I would suggest that today, Jesus is using what we call hyperbole. Hyperbole is a fifty-cent word for when you overstate your point in order to make our point.

For example, I am using hyperbole when I say that God made everything in the world and saw that it was good, EXCEPT for poison ivy. Somehow, poison ivy snuck in there when God wasn't looking, and poison ivy is not good, but instead is very very bad. Now, I hope you can tell that I am overstating my point in order to make my point. I actually still think that God made everything, including poison ivy, and I also still think God made everything good. By using overstatement, or hyperbole, I am saying that I REALLY DON'T LIKE POISON IVY!

Jesus over states his point in order to make his point at another place in Scripture, when he says, "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off." No, Jesus is not suggesting that we lop off bits of ourselves every time we do something wrong. Jesus is trying to convey that we need to approach sin with the same fear and intensity as that with which we would approach a rotary saw. That is, we seek to love God who brings hope and power and beauty, we seek to follow that hope, by loving ourselves and other human beings and the life of this planet with the same urgency and intensity and even fear as that with which we handle a rotary saw. We are very careful with a rotary saw because if we don't we might cut off a finger. We employ the same intensity when we care for life, and relationship and love.

Jesus uses hyperbole in the gospel lesson for today as well. He is overstating his point, to make his point. So what is his point?

His point is that our families cannot be our source of meaning, security and purpose. Our families cannot be God to us. It's not fair to them. It's not fair to make our children our source of meaning in life. It is not fair to make our parents our source of righteousness. Families can be places where we express the meaning of our lives. They can be a place where we fulfill our purpose to live out God's love for us, all people and creation. But families cannot be our meaning and purpose, because they are human, and they will fail. We need something bigger than our families, which loves our families. We need God.

Detail number two: the Greek word, "misei," which is translated with the word "hate," can also be translated as "Set aside, disregard." You can legitimately translate it as hate, too. But sometimes we have to set aside the approval of our families; sometimes we have to disregard our families assumptions or practices or opinions in order to follow Jesus.

This does not mean we cut ourselves off from our families. We talked about this two weeks ago: Jesus had a bumpy relationship with his family. At one point, his family thinks he's gone crazy so they come to get him. Jesus' disciples say, "Hey Jesus, your family's here." Jesus says, "Who is my family? Those who do the will of God are my mother, my sisters, my brothers."

And yet, Jesus stays in connection with his family. Mary, his mother is with him at the cross. James, his brother is a leader of the church in Jerusalem after his resurrection. Jesus stays connected.

We may have to set aside the assumptions or opinions of our families. But that does not mean we have to cut ourselves off from our families. Indeed, in a healthy spiritual community people will disagree and still be connected.

Sometimes, following Jesus will make things bumpy with our families, for example, if you are gay or lesbian or gender queer, and you feel called by Jesus to come out, or to get married to someone of your own gender, to live in care and respect and trust and trust worthiness, your family may disapprove. That doesn't mean you have to cut them off. You stay connected, and then you still follow Jesus.

Or, if you feel called by Jesus to work to have prayer in schools, your family may disagree. They may say, "Well what about children who are Buddhist? What about children who are atheist?" You may have a bumpy relationship. That doesn't mean you cut them off. You stay connected and you still follow Jesus.

Family does not determine everything for you. Jesus does.

Third detail: Notice Jesus says, "mother and father, wife and children." He does not say husband. Whew! That's a relief for those of us who are husbands. We get off scott free. Nobody has to hate us at all.

Is that what it means? No, I don't think so. I think it means that Jesus is talking to the men. He's talking to the husbands, not because they are any more or less important than everybody else, nor because they are any better or worse than the rest of us. He's talking to the men because they have the power in their families.

In Jesus' day, your family was everything. They were your school and your education, your job and your business. They were your insurance company and your

health care plan. They were your retirement plan and your funeral home In Jesus' day, the vast majority of people learned everything they needed to know to survive in their families. You farmed with your family. A small percentage of folks did carpentry and stone masonry and things like that, still with their families. If you got sick, your family took care of you, if you got too old to work, you lived with your family and when you died, your family buried you.

Family was security. Family was power. Family saved. And men had the power in the family. Jesus is saying "No, family does not save. God saves." God might use our families to help us. God might use our education and our employment to provide for us. God might use our medical system and our health care plan to cure us. God might use our retirement account and our funeral home to assist us at the end of our lives. God might use all these things, but Jesus is the one who saves. Jesus, at the cross, is beyond family. Jesus, who carries the love of God to us, even when we have betrayed our families, saves.

This is good news. Now, our families can be human. We are not made righteous, we are not made valuable or important or beautiful or dignified by our education, income, health or family.

Instead, we use our family life to show the love of God. We use our education, our businesses and employment, our healthcare system and our retirement accounts to live out the love of God which Jesus brings to us at the cross.

"None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions," Jesus says.

What's he saying? The same thing as before. We own nothing. Everything we have is God's including, our families. God has entrusted all of it to us, to be dealt with in ways that show the love of God that comes to us in Jesus Christ, who saves. Thanks be to God.