

Luke 14:25-33

Labor Day traditionally marks the end of the summer holidays. For some, school has already started, and, for others, school starts this coming week.

These next few Sundays present us here at St. Andrew's with a time of reconnecting with one another after the summer months.

It's a time of seeing old friends and meeting new ones.

It is a time of affirming our relationship with one another, through our membership in the Body of Christ.

It is a time during which we celebrate the joy of belonging.

And, on this day, we hear one of the difficult passages of the Gospel – one which seems to tear at the very fabric of what I have just described.

Large crowds, awed by what Jesus had been doing, had been following Jesus on his way to Jerusalem.

Luke tells us that Jesus turned to them and said, *"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."*

All these years of trying to bring people together into a caring community here at St. Andrew's "the church with a heart for the world", and now we hear Jesus saying that we are to hate those closest to us if we are to be his disciples.

Well, reading this passage raises for me the question, "What is it that Jesus is saying to those who followed him then, and to us today?"

To help with this, I turned to G. B. Caird, New Testament scholar and one-time Principal of Mansfield College, Oxford.

He writes that "to hate father and mother did not mean on the lips of Jesus what it conveys to the Western reader.

The Semitic mind is comfortable only with extremes – light and darkness, truth and falsehood, love and hate – primary colors with no half shades of compromise in between.

The Semitic way of saying “I prefer this to that” is “I like this and I hate that.”

Thus, for the followers of Jesus, to hate their families meant giving the family the second place in their affections.

This becomes clearer in the related passage from Matthew’s Gospel where Jesus says –

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worth of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

Thus, the first component of becoming and continuing to be a disciple of Jesus is to know and understand that the relationship with him is primary – above all other relationships. Three questions addressed to the candidates in the Sacrament of Baptism certify this fact:

1. Do you turn to Jesus and accept him as your Savior?
2. Do you put your whole trust in his grace and love?
3. Do you promise to follow and obey him as your Lord?

These are questions to each individual, not as a member of a family but as a unique child of God. And, each person must ultimately answer them for himself or herself.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the great German Theologian and Martyr in WW II, in his book, The Cost of Discipleship, affirms that the call of Jesus makes us individuals, for it comes to each of us separately, and each of us must follow alone. (p.105)

This brings us to the 2nd aspect of becoming and being a disciple of Jesus – Counting the Cost of Discipleship.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus puts this in the form of 2 questions –

1. *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?*
2. *...what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with 10,000 to oppose the one who comes against him with 20,000?*

The faith we proclaim should take at least as much consideration as we give to the vocation we choose or the house we want to buy.

Yet, do we seriously weigh the cost of discipleship?

That cost involves, as I have already said, to put our relationship with Jesus over and above all other relationships and to have those other relationships draw their meaning as a result of this primary relationship with Jesus.

The cost also involves being willing to speak out for those who are in need or who are seen by society as outcasts.

It means being a living example of god's love for the world even when it is not popular to do so.

It means becoming comfortable with sharing your faith when the opportunity presents itself.

As we look forward to the next two Sundays, and the beginning of a new program year at St. Andrew's, Jesus invites each of us to renew our willingness, on a daily basis, to make our relationship with him primary to our life journey, and our willingness to accept whatever costs are involved in this.