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 Luke 14:25-33  
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### **Do I Really Get to Hate My Brother?**

So, let me ask you all a question: Why you are here today? I would like to believe that you are here for the preaching. Hugh and the choir would like to believe that you are here for the music.

But we all have been around long enough to know that neither of those may be the case.

Maybe you were here for the breakfast. Maybe you are here because your wife made you come – or the other way around.

Or... maybe you are here to get that heavenly check mark next to your name. There are certainly lots of different possibilities.

But of all the various reasons why you may be here this morning, let us assume, just as a working hypothesis, that you are all here because you are trying to follow Jesus.

I mean, you could have slept in late - lots of people do. You could have gone to the beach or played golf. It's a great day for that, right?

But perhaps you are here in worship because you are trying, in your own little corner of the world, to follow Jesus, be his disciple.

And if that is the case, then it is my job to help you do just that ... which I do partly by exposing you to God's word in scripture.

But let's back up a minute. Were you paying attention when I read the Gospel text in Luke just a few minutes ago?

Where Jesus said you needed to HATE your mother and father, wife and children, brother and sister, in order to be his disciple? Are you kidding me? How do I preach on that?

Okay, I get my brother part – he was supposed to be here this morning and I was really hoping to be able to make fun of him ... but alas he had to go back home last night.

But, this is not exactly a "church growth" text, is it?

Can you just imagine the Pastor Nominating Committee meeting with a potential candidate to replace me, asking them: "So, tell us something of your understanding of church membership."

And what if he or she responded, "Well, to be a good member, the first rule is you must hate your father and mother, your wife and children, your brothers and sisters -- yes, even your own life.

"Then you must be prepared to die for the cause. As Jesus has said, anyone who is not prepared to give up EVERYTHING cannot be a member."

What if they actually said that? It is scriptural. I just read the passage from the Gospel of Luke.

But, I can hear Dave Robertson now, “Uh-huh. Well, thank you. Tell you what ... don’t call us, we’ll call you.

“Wait a minute – how long are your sermons? Can you promise to get us out by 11? Well ...”

And who could blame him?

Let’s admit it. Jesus made some strange comments. And this scripture takes the cake!

But, must we really hate our mother and father in order to be Christian? I thought being Christian meant promoting family values.

Believe it or not, this was the text I was asked to preach on for my very first sermon during my internship at St. John’s in Berkeley back in 1996.

And to top it off, my parents were in the congregation that day. Great! I mean what happened to the 5<sup>th</sup> commandment to honor your father and mother???

Luke says that Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem. A large crowd of supporters is accompanying him. But, Jesus knows trouble waits at the end of the journey.

Imagine the scene. A couple hundred people are stirring up a cloud of dust as they head south on the unpaved road. Jesus is taking the lead.

Each time the group passes through a village their numbers swell with enthusiastic local fans of this very special man.

They know his reputation as a preacher and healer and hear that he might actually be the long-awaited Messiah.

Of course, these folks never intend traveling all the way to Jerusalem. They just want to be part of the parade. Most drop out and return home after walking to the next village.

I can just imagine later, a man telling the story to his grandchildren. “Did I ever tell you about the time I walked with Jesus.

“Yep, he came right down Snell Ave. His apostles were with him -- James and John, Peter and Andrew. I met them all.

“When I saw the crowd coming, I jumped up from the breakfast table and walked all the way to Morgan Hill.

“Didn’t get home that night until after midnight. Was your grandmother upset with me!

“There was not, however, anything to worry about. I had a wonderful time. We laughed and joked.

“The apostles told us what Jesus had been doing and how we would be blessed if we followed his teachings. I remember the Apostle Peter even gave me his autograph.

“Let me tell you, It was a great day.”

Well, Jesus, walking at the head of the parade, realizes that this enthusiastic crowd does not grasp the significance of this journey to Jerusalem.

In a matter of days, Jesus will be arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. He will pay the ultimate price for his ministry. There will also be a cost to the followers of the Christ.

Stephen, the first deacon in the church, will be stoned to death for teaching of God’s love in Christ Jesus.

Tradition and church history tell us that all but one of the apostles will be martyred.

Andrew will die on a cross. Bartholomew skinned alive. James (son of Zebedee) beheaded. Simon crucified. James (son of Alphaeus) will be beaten to death.

Thomas run through with a lance. Matthias stoned and beheaded. Matthew slain by the sword. Peter will be crucified upside down.

Thaddeus shot to death with arrows. And Philip will be hanged.

Paul, who wrote much of the New Testament, will be tormented, ridiculed, arrested, imprisoned, beaten, and finally crucified for being a follower of Jesus.

For the next couple centuries, many Christians will worship in secret simply to avoid arrest.

In the Roman world before the time of Emperor Constantine, being a Christian required more than putting the symbol of a fish on the bumper of your car and attending church a couple times a month.

Declaring for Christ opened the possibility of becoming the lunch special for the lions in the Roman arena.

Well, as the crowd walks toward Jerusalem, they have given little thought to the cost of being followers of Jesus.

Yes, they are enthusiastic about this nice religious procession, but they are clueless about the demands of the faith.

Jesus tells them they must give serious thought to their walk with God. He reminds them that no one in his right mind starts to build a tower without calculating how much it is going to cost to complete it.

No king decides to go to war without first determining whether or not it is possible to win the war. In that same way, they must count the cost of faith.

That cost, Jesus insists, is very high. He even tells them, and here we go again, that they must hate their parents, spouse, children, etc. Now how in the world could he be serious?

In doing my research, I discovered that Jesus was actually using a figure of speech we don’t use anymore.

In Aramaic, the word we translate “hate” has nothing to do with an emotion. It was a way of expressing priorities.

For example, if I say, "I love the 49ers and hate the Dallas Cowboys," it wouldn't mean I feel animosity toward one team or the other, but simply that one of those was my first choice.

Okay, that may be a bad analogy. I don't really hate the Cowboys though. Really. Okay, maybe just a little...

In Jesus' day, the way you stated a preference was by pairing two things and saying you loved one and hated the other. It had nothing to do with feelings. The issue here was priorities.

The parallel passage about discipleship in Matthew 10 emphasizes the same point about comparison.

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

So, what Jesus was saying was that following him means your family must be a lesser priority than your faith.

In our time, being a follower of Christ seems to cost little. Go to church on occasion.

Learn whether to say the Lord's Prayer with "debts and debtors," "trespasses and trespassers," or "sins and sinners."

Read the Bible every once in a while.

If called, tell the Gallup Poll that you believe in God and are a Presbyterian. Heck, you don't even have to do that. Not much to this stuff of being a Christian.

However, contrary to the ease with which we can claim we follow Christ, there is, in fact, a cost, if we want to be his disciple.

It still might require us to go against the wishes of our father and mother. It might mean picking up our cross. It still might cause us to even give up our lives, at least as we know it.

William Willimon, the former chaplain of Duke University, tells the following true story:

A very angry parent phoned him one day.

"I have spent an enormous amount of money for my daughter to get a B.S. degree in mechanical engineering and now she wants to throw it all away and do mission work for the Presbyterians in Haiti.

"Can you imagine! A trained mechanical engineer digging ditches."

To which Willimon replied, "Well, you're right, I doubt that she's received much training in the Engineering Department here for that kind of work, but she's probably a fast learner and will probably get the hang of ditch-digging in a few months."

"Look," said the father, "this is no laughing matter. You are completely irresponsible to have encouraged her to do this. I hold you personally responsible," he said.

"Now how is that my fault?" Willimon responded. "What did I do?"

"I'll tell you what you did," the now shouting father answered.

"You ingratiated yourself with her, filled her head with all that religion stuff. She likes you. That's why she is doing this."

As the conversation went on, Willimon pointed out that the well-meaning, but obviously unprepared, parents were the ones who had started this ball rolling.

THEY were the ones who had her baptized, read Bible stories to her, took her to Sunday School, they were the ones who paid for her to go skiing with the youth group.

Willimon said, "You're the one who introduced her to Jesus, not me."

"I know, I know," the once-angry and now-grieving father lamented. "But all we ever wanted her to be was a Presbyterian." Hmm.

One just never knows when one of the kids might take the Christian faith so seriously she might turn her back on the wishes of the family and, God forbid, do missionary work in a far-off land.

We need to remember that Christianity is at its heart an entirely different way to look at the world.

One is not a Christian simply because of occasional church attendance, regular prayer and Bible reading, and the presence of a "I Love STHPC" license plate on your car. OOPS!

Christianity is a comprehensive way to think about the world, to decide right from wrong, and to interpret life's ordinary as well as extraordinary events.

Think of faith as a very good set of eyeglasses through which we see things as God wants us to see them.

I am convinced that looking through the corrective lenses of God's love often will clear up my vision so that I can see the landmines and potholes, as well as the beauty of God's created order.

Stated most succinctly, this Christian worldview understands that there is a God who is the Creator and Sustainer of the world we live in.

And we believe that we come to know this God best in Jesus of Nazareth, the one we claim as Lord and Savior.

This understanding of God Incarnate, God made flesh, leads us to realize that all people of the earth are brothers and sisters, children of the same parent God.

This Christian way to look at the world should determine our core values and influence the way we behave on a daily basis.

It is an understanding that helps us feel connected to the very nature of things. It calls us to a moral code that values people over things, forgiveness over revenge, and serving others over being served.

Our faith should be a way of looking at the world and valuing justice, mercy, kindness, and love over all else.

It makes it possible for us to feel the rush of God's grace-filled hope in the resurrection at the moment of grief when a loved one dies.

It empowers us to hope in that most mysterious promise of eternal life as we journey toward our own death.

However, growing into this Christian worldview is no simple, easy task. It takes significant time and commitment.

You see, it is costly to look through this "lens of faith." It is costly to be a follower of Christ.

Christian discipleship is not a matter of social conformity, personal convenience, economic advantage or escape from the harsh realities of life.

It is to love Christ ... above all else.

It is to find that his presence is our blessing, our strength against temptation, our joy in serving others, and our victory over whatever life might bring.

It means giving up the notion that the pursuit of money is the greatest good that leads to the greatest happiness.

It means giving up the notion that you personally are absolutely in charge of running the universe.

Sorry Horace – wait a minute – you're just in charge of explaining the universe!

It means learning to ask for forgiveness and to just as equally give forgiveness. It means putting the needs of others first. It means turning the other cheek.

It means loving your enemies and doing good to those that hate you.

It may even mean ... moving to Georgia!

So, let me ask you, are you up for being a disciple of Christ? Yes? So what are you going to do about it???

*Amen!*