

Sermon
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What was your reaction
to today's gospel?
Were you surprised
that Jesus sounds so harsh?
Were you uncomfortable
thinking about having
to hate your family
as Jesus describes
in order to follow him?

It's true that this is
a difficult gospel.
in fact it has left
generations of disciples
disappointed.

Why?
Because Jesus
is telling us
what it takes
to follow him,
and he's not
sugar coating a thing.

Put bluntly,
Jesus tells us three
hardcore requirements
for following him.

One: hate family.
Two: carry the cross.
Three: give up possessions.

Like the rich fool,
the requirements
for discipleship
may make us want
to turn away
and grieve.

But we shouldn't be surprised.

This actually is not
the first time Jesus
has warned that his message
and ministry will not be easy.
Just a few chapters past,
in Luke 12:51-53
Jesus warns that families
will be divided.

The sentences today
about hating family
being a requisite
for discipleship
are also reflected
in the gospel of Matthew
where it is put in slightly softer tones:

“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.”

Some commentators believe
that the term hate,
while accurately translated
from the Greek,
was actually used to show
preference or allegiance.

So Jesus is saying
that we cannot prefer
our human relationships
or possessions over him.

Others say that the term hate
actually meant to love less.
This is also used to explain
the use of the word hate
in the old testament
when we hear in Genesis
that Jacob loved Rachel
more than Leah

and that he “hated” Leah.

This theory suggests that Jesus
is warning against
making gods
out of those we love,
worshipping our
children, spouses,
parents – even
our leaders and celebrities
over worshipping him.

But I think this is one
gospel passage that
can't be soft pedaled.

Instead it must be unpacked.

Jesus was being blunt with the crowd.
He told them the truth.
Following Jesus
was risky and damaging.
He was garnering too much attention,
He was flaunting the rules.
He was being watched
and walked a road that
lead only to Golgotha.

Those who followed him
left family, relationships,
livelihood and associations.
They left possessions
and aspirations behind
and walked their own path
on a road that ended in
persecution and martyrdom
at worst,
rejection and expulsion
from family, synagogue
and society at best.

Jesus wants them to know
what they're getting into.
John Pilch tells us that
ancient eastern families
were tight knit.

The ideal marriage partner
was a first cousin,
sons, married and single
remain at home with the father.
Everyone ‘controls’
one another.”

In the east, then
family came first.
But Jesus is constantly
forming a new family,
making us brothers and sisters
united not by blood
but by the man –
the very son of man –
that we follow.

Jesus tells his disciples
to leave allegiances
and familiar possessions behind.

He calls for a reversal,
where we give up
worshipping the beautiful,
the successful,
the connected and instead
embrace those who follow him,
giving Him our love
by giving this new family
our all.

And this is more than
many can tackle.

Jesus looks at the crowd,
Knows he is on his way
To Jerusalem,
And gives them an out.

Britt Johnson notes that
Jesus knows about
crowd mentality.
“The crowds gathering
around Jesus
likely were looking for

a messianic leader
to incite them to violence.
Jesus is canceling
the crowd spirit
by stating in the strongest terms
what the cost
of discipleship means.
He was thinning the crowd.

Some would remain
in the safety of Galilee,
some would walk the
hard road toward
crucifixion.

If you are walking
the path of Jesus,
if you are carrying your own cross,
if you are bound
for the Hill of Skulls,
your security had better be
in God's own son,
in the promises he fulfills
in this world and in
the coming kingdom

You may have love
in this world,
and these loves are God's gifts,
but they are not God's
salvation.
That must come from Jesus.

And so, think twice
before you decide
to follow Jesus
be prepared to
give everything.
and in the giving,
be prepared to
receive everything
back as well.

Jeannine Brown
tells us that
"Salvation in Jesus

is not merely a transaction,
it is, at heart,
a covenantal relationship.
and no relationship lasts
without loyal commitments
and actions.

Because the one
who redeems us
also calls us into
costly discipleship.

Jesus' command
to "follow me"
is both gift and demand.

Amen.