

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Psalm 1

Philemon 1:1-21

Luke 14:25-33

Sermon Sept 8th, 2019

Jesus Gives Himself Up for Us

I am going to be honest with you here, trying to create a sermon for Welcome Sunday from Jesus' words this morning wasn't easy. How does Jesus preach hospitality a few verses earlier, and then in the verses we hear today, tell us to hate the people that mean the most to us? Or use a parable about war that at times has been interpreted in a way to encourage war/colonialism by the church?

Now, I could take the easy route and preach about one of the other stories we heard this morning. Most people don't mind hearing about the ten commandments and how we need to follow them. And Paul's plea to liberate a friend of his from slavery is an inspirational story to say the least. However, I am one of those people who likes to do things the hard way.

With that in mind, I want to share with you some of my thoughts I came up with when wrestling with this text. First, throughout the gospels Jesus is encouraging us to nurture the relationships we are in. So, to hear Jesus in a way that encourages us to leave church this morning and declare our hate for everyone we love is probably missing the point of what Jesus is trying to say. Just a little bit. Instead, Jesus may be using some form of literary exaggeration to drive home the point of how hard it is to follow Jesus' example. There is a large crowd of followers here just eager to get on board, but I'm sure Jesus has also seen many give up due to the difficulties one faces when following Jesus.

Jesus is challenging societal norms here. Or in other words, unwritten rules that people have a hard time letting go of. Jesus is challenging authority figures with the power to take his life. Day and night Jesus is giving himself to reflect God's love in our world and in our lives. The disciples have seen how much time and energy goes into living the way Jesus lives.

To forgive people who we were taught were unforgivable. To offer healing to those who we were taught to judge. To hang out with people who we were taught to stay away from. To feed people who we were taught caused their own circumstances, and so, deserved their lot. To live on the hospitality of others trusting that people will welcome you and care for you as you are. And not see you as a tax on the system. To be hospitable to others no matter what their race is or their gender or their orientation or their age or their religion or their denomination or their favorite sports team or even their hair thickness. To see each other as equal even when we are taught that some of

us are more deserving than others. To dedicate our whole lives to living this way. To hearing this good news through regular worship, prayer, and reading God's word. To living out this good news in love and service to others.

Jesus is asking a lot from us. Even our very souls. So, I can see why Jesus wants to nail home the point that this is going to be hard. Jesus doesn't want to pull the wool over our eyes. Jesus wants us to be prepared so that we are ready for what is to come.

Second, Jesus may be revealing to us what he is seeing. When people make major changes in their lives sometimes it impacts their relationships in a negative way. Reforming, reformation creates dividing lines, because not everyone is ready to change. Not everyone wants to deal with the chaos that comes with change. Our lives turned upside down. Waiting and waiting till we reach that status quo again. That place where we feel comfortable with our lives.

So, on one hand Jesus could be using exaggeration to prepare us for the hard journey ahead. On the other hand, Jesus could be giving us a reality check of what will happen to some of our relationships if we choose to follow Jesus. Again, to prepare us for the hard journey ahead.

However, you interpret this text, Jesus is challenging us to live a life of discipleship dedicating our lives to living like Jesus. Or in other words, Jesus is wanting us to integrate our faith in every aspect of our lives. Whether it is in the work we do, or in our relationships, or in our leisure time. Jesus is inviting us into a relationship with him even if it means we will have to carry our crosses along the way. Even if not every person we love understands.

Because, Jesus gives everything of himself to be with us. Jesus dedicates his life to loving us. To caring for us. To healing us. To forgiving us. To teaching us. Jesus challenges the authorities for us. Jesus faces death on the cross for us. In the resurrection, Jesus promises to be with us always. So, when Jesus is inviting us to follow him, we can see why Jesus wants us to be all in. Because Jesus is all in.

In response to the parables he uses, Jesus chooses these parables not to promote war and violence since his central message is about peace, but to show that his message reaches all social standings. Rich and poor. A construction worker and a king. Whatever lot you come from, you are invited to pick up your cross and follow.

So, when we dive deep into the text and hear these words in the context of all Jesus has to say in the gospels we see that following Jesus is difficult, but we are all invited to follow. We are all loved and welcomed by Jesus. How do I come to this conclusion? You may ask after hearing today's gospel. Well, if Jesus didn't love us and didn't want

every one of us to follow him then why would he give so much of himself to us. His time. His energy. His love. His life. All for us.

Jesus even gives us his Spirit so that we don't have to take up our crosses and carry them alone. The Holy Spirit is our helper. The one who lifts us up and empowers us to give ourselves over to Jesus and his ministry. To give ourselves to one another. To not hate, but actually love our family, friends, and neighbor in self-giving ways. To live every aspect of our lives with the love, hospitality, and grace Jesus has given us.

Let us pray, Jesus sometimes your words challenge the core of our very being. Thank you. May we take up your challenge and live dedicating our lives to you. Remembering your self-giving love. **Amen.**

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