

#43 15-16

Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18

Jeremiah 18:1-11

Philemon 1-21

Luke 14:25-33

Reworking Our Souls

Now large crowds were traveling with him; and he turned and said to them, “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. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. 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? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

Today’s scriptures need to work together, if we are to come to any peaceful understanding. Otherwise, if we leave this scripture as it stands, with no other influences ~ then we might as well give up calling ourselves Christians at all. What on earth can the author of this Gospel mean by HATING - anyone - let alone those we cherish the most as humans! How can we hear - “love you neighbor as yourself” - and then “hate yourself” - and make any sense of this Gospel?

The author of this Gospel was certainly trying emphasize - with great urgency - how following Christ’s teachings was vital to life itself. This was a budding new faith, and the emotions are running high in making sure this faith gets off the ground! And it is true - to get the most out of a life with Christ - one must value the bond with him more than anything else in our lives ~ replacing all we are, and all we know, and all we have, with the priority of a desire to live in integrity as a Disciple of Jesus Christ.

Because our lives as human beings are truly susceptible to the slightest things - as well as the big things. Personal tragedies can create in us miserable unhappy beings, when Christ is calling for us to live in him and know the joy that is found in him. Family habits - that we were brought up with - can create in us a sense of entitlement which separates us from the rest of humanity, when Christ is calling us to notice other human beings in need, so they can rise to be of service as well. Our ego based human lives can lead us so casually away from the will of God, and cause us to believe that we are who we truly aren’t. So it is vital that we at least toy with the idea of separating ourselves from all that we claim as being uniquely us - test the waters and see - are our personalities, our desires and our opinions - are they truly something that meshes with God, as we see through the teachings and the life of Christ?

Sometimes it is hard to separate ourselves from something we love so dearly - our family, our habits, our joys - and the only way to get us to look at them differently is to wedge a kind of hate there. Hate what separates us from God. This is how I finagle my way around this. Hate whatever separates us from God - and in a way we can say we are following Christ’s teachings. Because at the same time we are called to love and care for each other as God loves us.

So, in separating ourselves, and looking at our lives and our loves as something we can hold away from us and observe - we are better able to discern what empowers us to do God’s will, and what distracts, hinders - or even causes us to rebel against God’s Will. If we cannot look at this, if there is no separation - we are always in danger of loving ourselves more than God. This is called the cost of Discipleship. It isn’t an easy price to pay. Our Savior set a high standard for following God’s will. And he is asking us to

take a chance of losing what we hold dearest, in order to gain a life that is far greater than we could imagine!

Jeremiah's example of a potter reworking a messed up vessel - and God said, "Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done? . . . Just like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand." This is why we have lives of faith - seeking a life grander than we know our lives to be - yearning for truth and life and love and clarity and wisdom and community - in grander scales than we could possibly know from our own egos and families!

The letter that Paul wrote to Philemon about Onesimus, also shows some radical reworking. I have a sermon I wrote 6 years ago on this scripture which I thought was interesting, so I made a couple of copies in case anyone was interested. This scripture is about this slave who Paul met in jail - we don't know how he got to this jail - many have surmised he was a runaway ~ and Paul greeted him and converted him and sent him back to Philemon. Now . . . this scripture was used during the civil war on both sides of the slavery argument - that Paul was returning property to its rightful owner - and that Paul was freeing a beloved soul and offering a lesson in humanity to a slaveholders family. Because as someone who knew Judaism very well, former slaves from Egypt, Paul was not only likely to be one to lightly return a slave into that life - especially since there were laws in the Torah prohibiting such things! SO this story is about the seeds reworking the souls of a slave into a beloved brother of the great evangelist himself - but also transforming a slave holder into a Christian who could not, by conviction, keep another soul in bondage.

Our scriptures are about actively reworking our souls from children of our families and cultures and into becoming followers and believers and seekers of a life in the spirit of the living God! This is what salvation is all about. Salvation really is a personal thing. Once we own the importance of our own spiritual journey, that is when we become a greater part of all the universe - including all those we "separated" ourselves from. Once we can see our egos for what they are - we can determine more easily if what we think and feel about others is truly helpful to the kingdom of God or not. We need to begin the process of separation from this world so we can help God in the remolding process.

And when we feel the power of God in us, we can become, just by being transformed ourselves ~ mighty tools for a transformation of this world! Onesimus was only a slave - and his name goes down in history as son, the heart of Paul - the great missionary!

As a final word, I would like to mention to you something related to our being called to contemplate our personal Cost of Discipleship. According to the website of the World Council of Churches: "September 1st was proclaimed as the World Day of Prayer for Creation by the Orthodox Church in 1989, and many other Christian churches have joined since then, with Pope Francis most recently in 2015. It was then extended to be a month-long Season of Creation, ending on October 4 (Feast of St. Francis)." Our Denomination has also requested that their churches contemplate being a part of this month long observation of praying for this world. As well as thinking and learning and praying, we are being asked to contemplate what we are willing to sacrifice from our daily cultural habits which may help show a greater love and respect for this world we share and have been given the responsibility for. In the weeks to come, I will be supplying this congregation with information on how to become a more faithful steward of this world's life. So keep your eyes open and your hearts and minds free for a reworking of our lives in love of our planet.

Peace be with us all as go forth in the adventure of choosing Christ. AMEN