



Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. **AMEN**

Well, I see not many of you have taken me up on the invitation to get out of your comfort zone and sit in the front row? Well, if last week's sermon did not get you out of your comfort zone, this week's Gospel lesson is sure to do just that.

"Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sister, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple." WOW. I spent part of my study time trying to find different versions or translations of the Bible to soften the blow a bit. Here is what I found: The Passion Translation says, "you must put aside your father, your mother, etc." This is an Aramaic and Hebraic metaphor for putting Jesus above every other relationship. This comes from the Aramaic word "sna" which shows that Jesus, the King of Love is not saying to hate but to put aside every other relationship into second place. So, in Aramaic this phrase's meaning is quite clear. In our English language not so much.

In Eugene Peterson's, paraphrase of the Bible, called The Message, he says, "Anyone who comes to me but refuses to let go of father, mother, etc.". Not as strong as the word our NRSV uses of hate, and still it gets across the message that Jesus wants to come first. No doubt, no exception.

Remember, last week Jesus, in our reading, was at a small intimate dinner banquet. Today, we have Jesus surrounded by great crowds. And we go from Jesus being a guest to now having multitudes following him. They are

traveling with him with infectious enthusiasm. His message has not changed. God still demands first place in our lives and that kind of discipleship is costly. It is so costly that many might not want to hear Jesus. It requires total commitment that once was reserved for family.

I do believe that Jesus using the word “hate” in some translations, is a Semitic hyperbole or exaggeration for effect. Jesus is not calling us to hate our parents, our spouses, and children, but instead calling us to a commitment above all other commitments, including the commitment to family. And as we well know, if we make that commitment, Jesus promises that we will be rewarded. But that promise is not written in this lesson, but rather later on in the Gospel of Luke.

Luke goes on to tell us that not only must we chose Jesus above our families, but we must also strap on a cross and follow him. We have the advantage here to understand completely what that means. Jesus died on the cross for us, so does he want us to be put to death for him, as well. The folks that Luke was writing too did understand what it was like to be cross-bearing. Persecution had begun and Christians were dying on crosses.

One commentary I read said, “This verse raises a question in a day when Islamic zealots strap bombs to their bodies and detonate them in busy marketplaces. They do so gladly in the belief that God will reward their martyrdom, but in the process, they give religious enthusiasm a bad name. You ask, what is the difference between Christian cross-bearing and Islamic zealotry? The difference is that Christ calls us to love each other, to love even our enemies. Love, not bombs, is the Christian change agent.” Great explanation. As Christians we are not called to detonate bombs to kill or put others in harms way. Instead, we are called to unlikely life paths that proclaim God’s love for us.

So, you see that today’s text is not an easy one. It too takes us out of our comfort zone, once again. It is not one that will increase our church membership, for sure. I remember my call committee interview. They asked how I would get more “butts” in the pews at Christ the Servant. I must have said something right as I am still here today, but if I had said that I must get you to hate your parents, spouses, and children so that you will be prepared to die for the cause, giving up everything you own, or you cannot be a member. I doubt I would have been called to his congregation. And in fact, I do not look at membership that way. Many of you have heard me say that I have never been about making members, but rather I am interested in making disciples

for Christ. And if that then makes someone want to join our congregation in ministry, that is wonderful.

Certainly, I am not saying that we should dummy down the cost of discipleship, but I do think that we need to make it realistic. Today life is not as simple as a Norman Rockwell print of families lined up in a comfortable pew in a sanctuary graced by light filtered through stained glass windows, listening to a smiling grey-haired preacher. I think that today in our society, we tend to get too comfortable and complacent. And that my friends is when things start to unravel. Look at the mess our world is in today. War in Ukraine, famine in Africa, healthcare unavailable for millions, clean water in jeopardy, a pandemic that keeps erupting, gun violence, disregard for police, and the list can go on.

We all need to be disciples of Jesus and move out of our comfort zones and love God first and then secondly, love our neighbors as ourselves. That is our Gospel lesson for today. Being a disciple is all about learning, learning to be all God made you to be. And that is a loving, caring, giving, servant of others following in Jesus' footsteps. Our talents are God given and should be used to His glory, not our own as the world teaches. That is why it is so important to continue to read Scripture and let the Holy Spirit speak through those words to each one of us. That is also why we need to be students of Jesus, disciples. I sure wish that we all would have brought our backpacks last week, backpacks filled with Bibles, concordances, Books of Concord, study guides and brought them up front to be blessed. We all must continue learning what God is calling us to do. And we too will find that we are blessed when we come to understand and live the word of God.

Any of you remember the commercial back in 1982 from the Army. "Be All you can Be". I could sing it just like I heard it yesterday. What a cliché but it was memorable. In this recruiting commercial it told you that you would learn to reach deep inside of you. And it came to the conclusion that "You can do it in the Army." Well, I would suggest to you today that you can do it in the army of Jesus today too. Jesus wants You. That is another great slogan by Uncle Sam, if you will. But it is the same with Jesus. He wants you to be a disciple, first and foremost, he wants you to follow Him. Jesus wants you and accepts you, what you are willing to offer here in the moment. But He wants

more. He wants you to be all you can be, and that is a follower, who puts everything aside to walk with the Lord.

I pray none of us will have to stand before a firing squad for our beliefs or go to the gallows for being a Christian. But we will be tested in smaller ways. And folks, every time we choose Jesus over the things of the world, a little part of our old nature will die, and a little part of Christ's New Creations will be born in us. We have nothing to lose but our old sinful self in following Jesus.

Have any of you read the Velveteen Rabbit, a 1922 children's book written by Margery Williams? Remember the story? Once upon a time there was this little stuffed rabbit who lived on a shelf in the nursery, who wanted, more than anything else in the world, to be real. So, he asked the Skin Horse, who seems to be the oldest and wisest of the bunch and the Skin Horse said, "It doesn't happen all at one. You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't often happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints, and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."

That is not just a description of old age, but of Christian discipleship. We grow in the grace of and love of God, little by little and as we experience God's grace and love, we give more and more of ourselves in return as a thank offering. We get there one step at a time.

There is more of the kingdom of God for us to experience and we will always have more to give back in return. And so, we are invited to follow Jesus and taste the first fruits of eternal life by living an abundant life here on earth. It is all about God's grace. Jesus Christ gave the ultimate sacrifice for us on the cross, his life. That grace filled act does deserve our first and foremost commitment to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind and then to love our neighbor as ourselves. **AMEN**