



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. AMEN

Our Gospel lesson for today gives us several of Jesus' most difficult teachings. They are difficult sayings, not because they are hard to understand, but because they are almost impossible to accept. Does Jesus really expect us to turn our backs on our families? Does Jesus really expect us to give up everything we own? Does He really think that we can carry our own cross? And what does that mean anyway? That is what Jesus is telling the people that were traveling with him and there were many, many people in the crowd as He got closer to Jerusalem. And it is what He is telling us today, as well.

As for the big picture, I think we can all deduce that being a disciple of Jesus is not an easy task. There is a huge cost of discipleship that we must consider. Christian discipleship comes at a hefty price. It requires us to let go of the things of this world and serve Christ and Christ alone. And it might even mean giving up your own life for the sake of the gospel. That seems a huge cost to me, to be His disciple.

So, it is possible that many will fall away as they hear these hard truths Jesus is talking about. But Jesus wants everyone to know what God expects of them if they are to be His disciples. Jesus is simply telling it like it is, using abrasive, Jewish speech patterns to a Jewish crowd. He is using exaggeration to make His point. To "hate" as Jesus used the word was not an emotional feeling. For, why would a loving God want us to hate our family. I think that Jesus is trying to drive home a point that to follow Him, to be a disciple of His, you must put everything else second in life. I don't know about you, but my mom told me never ever to use the word hate. And I think in our translation from the Greek, the word hate was the best word they could find. From the Greek the meaning is to be more like "not to prefer". But that just does just not quite fit into this translation. Also, I do appreciate Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of the Bible, The Message. His wording says, "Anyone who comes to me but refuses to let go of father, mother, spouse, children. . . .". I do believe that this is more likely what Jesus was saying. We need to have a commitment to Him above all other commitments, including the one to family. Our lives as disciples of Christ are not based on a feeling but rather on a choice of our will. God gave us freedom of choice and we can choose to be a disciple or not.

If we choose to be a disciple Jesus wants our true devotion to Him. He has laid out the true cost. That's because honoring your father and your mother, the 4th, and my favorite commandment, does not mean obeying them instead of God. And loving your children doesn't mean letting them rebel against their Savior. Defending the life God has given you does not mean denying Him to save yourself. OUCH! These are his hard truths.

Are Jesus' demands possible? Maybe, but we are human after all. We cannot perfectly follow his demands to be a disciple, just like we cannot possibly keep all of God's laws, hard as we try. But that is not to say that His demands here are not for us. They are. We need to put everything else at arms-length, in second place in our lives, second to Jesus. He comes first, even before family, before our relatives and before our own lives.

Just think for a minute about the impact of that statement. Let it filter into your hearts. It is a radical thought, isn't it? Jesus is calling us to a radical kind of life. A life that is lived, which sets those who believe in Him apart from, the rest of society. This is the life we lead after we die to the things of this world. Christ gives us new life. And this is what we need to hear this morning. Jesus demands our all. Only as we die completely to the things of this world can we hope to experience the full power of his resurrection from the dead. And if we cannot give it all on our own, Jesus is willing to take what we give as a sort of entry level discipleship. How much can you give to God at this moment? Your money, your life, or your time? It is a start and Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in your hearts to lead the way to a fuller discipleship calling. This is because we all fall short of the glory of God.

In the last part of this text Jesus is asking us if we will be willing to pay this kind of price to be His followers. Are we willing to turn the love we have for Him into action? We need to count the cost of discipleship to see if we are willing to make such a sacrifice. To make such a sacrifice we need to consider the options. This is not unlike building a tower or a house without making sure we have the money and materials to complete it. Nor it is unlike going to war against another force with less soldiers behind you. We do have a choice here. But it is a no brainer to me, to accept God's grace.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a wonderful book called the Cost of Discipleship. In it he says, "we have cheapened grace and cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our church. We are fighting for costly grace. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance; baptism, without church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession."

Cheap grace is grace without discipleship. And grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ is not grace at all. Costly grace is the gospel, which must be sought again and again. Costly grace is the gift which must be asked for. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life abundant. Grace is costly because it compels us to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow only Him.

I don't want to go any further into the discussion of whether grace is cheap or expensive. Although I do hope that you get the idea that God's grace is extremely costly. And we never want to pretend it is anything other than costly because there is a price to be paid. You must be willing to pay the price, to place Jesus and his will above all else in our lives. That is the true cost.

So let go and let God give you the grace earned on the cross by Jesus Christ. It is an amazing grace that will cost you your life. Yet it will yield you the reward of abundant life here on earth and the

promise of eternal life in heaven one day. I hope you can all see what God has planned for you. He loves you so much that He gave his only Son to die for you and sent the Holy Spirit to keep in front of you the importance of being a disciple of Christ.

And now you know that you cannot go home without at least one story. And this one is special as it has a story in a story. So here goes:

One day, a young disciple of Christ wanting to become all that God had for him visited the home of an elderly Christian. He had heard that this old man had never lost his first love for Christ in all the years he had known Him.

The old Christian was sitting on the porch with his dog stretched out before him taking in a beautiful sunset. The young man posed this question: "Why is it, brother, that most Christians zealously chase after God during the first year or two after their conversion, but then fall into a complacent ritual of church once a week and end up not looking any different than their neighbors who are not even Christians?"

The young man continued. I have heard you are not like that. I have been told that you have fervently sought after God throughout your years as a Christian. People see something in you that they don't see in most people who became Christians. What makes you different?"

The old man smiles and replies, "Let me tell you a story: One day I was sitting here quietly in the sun with my dog. Suddenly a large white rabbit ran across in front of us. Well, my dog jumped up and took off after that big rabbit. He chased the rabbit over the hills with a passion. Soon, other dogs joined him, attracted by his barking. What a sight it was, as the pack of dogs ran barking across the creeks, up stony embankments and through thickets and thorns!

Gradually, however, one by one, the other dogs dropped out of the pursuit, discouraged by the course, and frustrated by the chase. Only my dog continued to hotly pursue the white rabbit." "In that story, young man, is the answer to your question."

The young man sat in confused silence. Finally, he said, "Brother, I don't understand. What is the connection between the rabbit chase and the quest for God?"

"You fail to understand," answered the well-seasoned man, "because you failed to ask the obvious question. Why didn't the other dogs continue on the chase?"

And the answer to that question is that they had not seen the rabbit. Unless you see the prey, the chase is just too difficult. You will lack the passion and determination necessary to keep up the chase."

And so, I ask you. . . . Have you seen the Lord? Are you willing to count the cost to follow the Lord by keeping your eye on the prize. Not the prize of heaven, but the prize of the one who will get you there, Jesus Christ?

I hope that you will keep your eyes on Jesus and follow Him as a disciple. His grace will then be shed on you. Keep trying to pay the costly price that our Lord and Savior requires. Surrender your love to God. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son to us so we could have His grace.
AMEN