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**When Jesus Says We Should Hate**

**September 4, 2016**

**Luke 14:25-33**

Grace and peace to you from God Our Father and from Jesus Christ who bids us to count the cost of following Him, amen.

Don’t you just hate it when Jesus says “hate”? … I was going to preach about something else today, anything else, really… I just couldn’t stop thinking about this word. If I preached about another subject from the First Reading or the Second, it’d be like I was ignoring the elephant in the room. Sometimes you just have to call it out. I’d have been a whole lot happier if Jesus had said love your family and hate evil. That I can understand. Before we even try to unpack this hard and complicated teaching, the first thing I want all of you to know is we’re talking about discipleship, not salvation. Let me say it another way. This isn’t about your salvation. Salvation is a free gift of God’s Grace, through faith. Period. This discussion is about the now what… Now that we no longer have to worry about our eternity, what should we do now… Figuring out how to walk by faith into this new life, that’s called discipleship and that ***IS*** what we’re talking about here…

So, what are our options in trying to understand what Jesus is teaching us today? Unfortunately, all of the options I came up with are pretty lame… Maybe he didn’t really say we have to “hate” our family and our own life, or maybe he did say it, but he didn’t really mean it… To get to the bottom of this you have to understand where the saying comes from and put it into the proper historical context. First of all, this teaching of Jesus wasn’t written in Greek like most of the rest of the New Testament. A few of the words and teachings of Jesus were first written in Jesus’ native language of Aramaic. This language was what most people spoke in the Middle East during the time of Jesus. It was an offshoot of and closely related to the Hebrew language of the Jewish people. The Aramaic word "hate" is an expression meaning “to turn away from, to detach oneself from,” rather than our animosity-laden, highly emotional understanding of hate today. Jesus is really saying that if you don’t detach yourself from your family, mother, father, siblings, even your own life, then you cannot be His disciple. Now think about the time when Luke wrote this Gospel. It was right after the Romans defeated the Jewish uprising and utterly destroyed the Temple and all of Jerusalem. Christians weren’t faring any better. Christians were being persecuted just for saying Jesus is Lord. In families where one person converted to Christianity it literally did mean he or she would be detached from their family, not to mention sometimes having their heads detached from their bodies…

Let’s also think for a moment about Jesus’ audience for these teachings. Jesus is addressing the large crowd of people that followed him around seeking to have all their demons cast out, every infirmity cured by yet another miracle healing, and gobbling up every free meal they could get. These were not the close disciples Jesus was talking to. These were free-loading hangers-on’s hoping to get another ride on the magic bus called Jesus. There were people that were along for the ride as long as he was handing out free stuff. To these freeloaders Jesus was painting a picture of the cost of discipleship that sounds offensive to our ears. When we hear the words they do sound offensive, but I actually believe none of you should be offended by Jesus’ teaching on the cost of being his disciple at all. I believe you have already counted that cost and you’re all in. I’ve been around here long enough to have seen you all in action so many times. You already know about putting Jesus ahead of your family, carrying your cross, and denouncing your possessions. You have been doing these things for a long, long time. The latest example was just last Friday evening when you prepared and served the FM Boys and Girls Varsity Soccer Teams and their families their team dinner. You know what it means to sacrifice your time with your family to do so many of the service projects Trinity is so famous for. You know just how heavy the cross is and how far the road to Calvary and you’ve proven over and over again you are not consumed by your possessions. This is the most generous giving and loving Congregation I’ve ever been associated with! And you know I’ve been around quite a few Church congregations. From Virginia to Arizona and from Texas to Alaska, I’ve never seen a more generous, compassionate and caring community of believers.

I know we’ve been stretched these past few months. Normally the summer is when things slow down. People go away on vacation, they relax and unwind. Maybe even sleep in on a Sunday or two… This summer we didn’t have that luxury. We started things off with the Outdoor Worship Service and Picnic and then jumped head first into Vacation Bible School at the same time we organized and executed a totally outstanding 150th Anniversary Celebration complete with hosting our Bishop. Just when you thought things were going to get back to normal—BAM!!--Revive Ohio hit; not for one week or two weeks, but three weeks and right through the entire week of the Great Darke County Fair. We didn’t even stop to catch our breath before we took a Leap for the Lord on Rally Sunday. Then in the same week you all put on an absolutely fantastic dinner for the FM Soccer Teams. In the midst of it all you never missed a beat taking care of the FISH pantry, the Grace Resurrection Soup Kitchen, or quilting, or Wernle Home and the list goes on and on… Wow, I’m tired just thinking about it all! I know you are too… I want to say from the bottom of my heart you are the best disciples of Jesus ever and I love each and every one of you! Not because of all these things you do, but because of your love for Jesus that motivates you to do them in the first place. You are an inspiration to me and a leader in the Church. I know it’s been a long hard road, but you guys have responded out of the love and the joy that springs from that deep, deep spiritual well Jesus called living water.

I want to thank you for all you’ve done and continue to do. Too often all we hear is that we don’t do enough. We don’t lift the cross high enough or carry it far enough. Sometimes it seems all we hear is how we never do enough or we never give enough because we haven’t given up all our possessions. Well, I’m telling you right now, and please hear this if you hear nothing else today, everything you do; from preparing a dish to share, to praying for our youth; from filling an envelope and a pothole, to packing a school kit; from doing the dishes after a meal, to trimming the shrubbery and cutting the grass; from setting the altar linins to getting the bread for communion; every last thing you do is appreciated and it all makes a difference. It makes a difference in our congregation, it makes a difference in our little town of Pitsburg, and it makes a difference all across our county. You are making a difference and you are advancing the Kingdom of God.

I wish I could promise you the load would get lighter, the path would get easier, and the cost of being a disciple of Jesus would be less, but I can’t promise you any of those things. The truth is, even Jesus knew how hard it would be, how heavy the cross, and how costly the journey. It cost him everything… Here’s the thing, even though he knew the cost, He walked the road to Jerusalem. Knowing his fate He set His face toward the Cross and never looked back. He carried that cross for you and for me. He loves you that much...

I might not be able to fully understand myself, let alone explain to you, what He meant when he said we wouldn’t be able to be his disciple if we don’t hate our parents, siblings, and our own lives, but I know one thing for sure, I serve a savior who loves me even when I’m at my most unlovable. Because of that I’m willing to at least try to follow, even when I have to turn away from or detach myself from the things I love the most and from what I’ve seen around this church you all share that same passion.

May you count the cost of following Jesus and come to know that whatever you have to give, Jesus loves you no matter what. Even in your most unlovable moment, that’s the moment Jesus died to redeem. May your spiritual well be filled to the brim with the living water flowing from Jesus Christ. May the joy you receive from loving and being loved by Jesus sustain you every day on our journey of faith. Amen.