

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our master and guide,
Jesus Christ our Lord, amen.

Well, here we go again! Another one of those Gospel texts that makes you sit up listen more closely and then shake your head... Today we have Jesus at his confounding best. I'm not sure how you hear this Gospel story, but it sure raises some questions for me. Who can meet these demands? Hate your family and even your own life; bear your cross and follow Jesus; and the final requirement, get rid of all, that's 100% of your possessions... Wow! Those are some steep costs when it comes to following Jesus. How we've watered them down...

There's so much packed into this teaching from Jesus it's hard to know where to begin unpacking the treasures. We may as well just jump right in and try to tackle the glaring elephant in the room, hating our parents, spouse, goods, honor and house. In our English translation Jesus says we're to hate our parents, spouse, and even our children and by extension our even more precious grandchildren. Sorry Jesus, that's not happening... I'm not sure it's even possible for most of us to hate our family, to bear our crosses, and to give up all our possessions. Does that mean it's impossible for us to be Jesus' disciples? Today's Gospel is from Luke, chapter 14, but if you peek ahead to Luke chapter 18 Jesus has doubled down on the extreme cost of following him to the point that the disciples ask who

can be saved??? ... Jesus' answer, With mortals, it is impossible, but God makes the impossible happen.

Before we get all hot and bothered by these seemingly impossible demands, let's take a closer look and see what Jesus is really doing here. The first thing we need to look at is this word hate. The meaning of hate in English has to do with intense hostility, extreme dislike or disgust, or to express or feel extreme enmity or active hostility. The Greek word we have translated as hate is the word μισεῖ. It actually means to be disinclined to do something or to disfavor someone or something, or to disregard them. If I were translating this text, I would make it read something like "to turn away from, to detach oneself from" instead of hating... In the same story as told in Matthew's Gospel chapter 10, verse 37, Jesus says, "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." So, if we can get past our modern context of the word hate by dropping the animosity laden connotations, maybe we can dig down and discover the point Jesus is making.

The next thing we need to be aware of is the grammar of Luke 14:26, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters-- yes, even their own life-- such a person cannot be my disciple. My translation of this verse would be: If anyone comes to me and doesn't turn away from father, mother, wife, and children, brothers and sisters—

yes even their own soul, life, their very self—such a person, who can't give up these 'idols' isn't able to be my disciple. This isn't Jesus telling people to start hating their family or their own life, it's a description or a depiction of what happens when one fully commits to being a disciple of the one headed to Jerusalem where the cross awaits his arrival. I just used the word idol to describe not just our possessions, but also our family members including children and grandchildren.. That was on purpose... Whatever comes between you and God is your idol. The first commandment says, "You shall have no other gods." In Martin Luther's explanation to this commandment he says a god is a term for whatever you look to for all good and where you find refuge in time of need. In other words, in what or whom do you place your trust? Is it your retirement 401K? Is it the legacy of your descendants? Is it your own physical strength and abilities or your intellectual capability? Luther went on to say anything on which your heart relies and depends, that is really your god. So, what Jesus is trying to get his followers to understand is our identity, is not tied up with our possessions our family our home or even our very life itself. The time when I see this play out in a very visible way is when I'm privileged to sit with families around the hospital bed of a beloved family member who is facing the end of life. What I've observed is some people just hold on and hold on. They're clinging to their idols right up until the very end. Many times, the spouse or a beloved child or grandchild can whisper into the dying

person's ear that it's okay to let go of whatever it is that's holding them back from going to be with Jesus. You would be surprised how many times that's all it takes to help the dying person release all the stuff they are clinging to in order to enter into the pearly gates to the city of God where the streets are paved with gold.

What we're talking about here is the cost of discipleship. German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his book titled *The Cost of Discipleship* talks a lot about cheap grace. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate. Jesus is using this really tough hyperbole because He's noticed the crowds are growing exponentially and many of those following him haven't counted the cost. Some may have just been along for the ride because of all the miracles. Some might have been captivated by Jesus' preaching and teaching. Others might have just seen the crowd growing and wanted to be a part of what ever this Jesus Christ had to offer, such as more free food and this living water that cures your thirst forever... It's to this large crowd that Jesus says you are not able to be my disciple unless you do these three things: 1--hate your family, 2—bear your cross, and 3—give up all your possessions.

We already talked about hating really meaning to subordinate everything in this life to God and Jesus. The second part of this costly discipleship involves

bearing your cross. This is such a misinterpreted phrase. Bearing a cross has nothing to do with chronic illness, painful physical conditions, or trying family relationships. It is instead what we do voluntarily as a consequence of our commitment to Jesus Christ. Cross bearing requires deliberate sacrifice and exposure to risk and ridicule in order to follow Jesus. Sometimes bearing your cross means to be prepared to endure severe suffering, even to the point of death. I wasn't there, but I'd wager the crowds following Jesus may have begun to decline.

The third part of Jesus' teaching on discipleship involves giving up all your possessions. This is a curious command. The giving standard in the ancient Jewish religion was and for the most part still is 10% of all your gross income. Then there's the story of Zacchaeus. Remember him? He was the short, rich fellow who wanted to see Jesus so desperately he climbed up a Sycamore tree. When Jesus stopped to talk to Zacchaeus, old Zack's life changed forever. He said he would donate half, that's 50%, of all he owned. Jesus response to Zacchaeus was to proclaim that today salvation has come to Zack's house. Then there's the story about the rich young ruler who asked Jesus what he must do to be saved. Jesus instructed this man to keep the commandments and sell *all* he owned and give the proceeds to the poor. Okay Jesus, so what is the cost of discipleship? Is it the 10% tithe that dates way back from of old? Is it selling off half of what you own like Zacchaeus, or must we give up all 100% of everything? My answer to

these questions might surprise some of you. Since different amounts or percentages are dictated in different stories it occurred to me the monetary amount isn't all that relevant. What Jesus wants us to consider is how impossible it is to follow Him by our own power or intellect. No one can do all these things God demands. If we could we wouldn't need a Savior to make the impossible, possible.

That's where free grace comes swooping in to save the day and our souls... Free Grace isn't earned by giving away your possessions or by any other good works for that matter. It's free, that's the whole point. Here's one of those things that set Lutherans apart from other denominations. We know and live in the tension smack dab in the middle of Free Grace on the one hand and costly discipleship on the other. On one hand, Jesus makes it very difficult to be his disciple. It will cost us everything and we need to know the cost before jumping in. On the other hand, Jesus makes it impossible to be his disciple on our own abilities. When we confess, "I can't," then we are open for God's "I can."

May we learn the true costs of being a disciple of Jesus Christ. May we take inventory on those things that stand between us and God. May God grant us the ability to give up every last one of our idols. May God give you peace with family relationships by placing them and every other idol lower than Jesus Christ. May you grow in your faith by picking up the cross, following Jesus, and never looking back. Amen.