

For a Christian, the Cross Always Comes First  
Luke 14:25-33  
Pentecost 13c Pastor Pufahl September 4, 2022

“Dad, are you almost ready to go?” Perhaps the son was eager to get on the road to start the long journey. Mom wasn’t coming this time. I can only imagine this was a typical family. Every day, dad would go to work. He did what he had to do. And, every day, he would come home. He loved his family. He loved his child.

But, this wasn’t just any ordinary child. They prayed for this child. They wanted this child badly! And, every day they had this child, they were going to show this child love.

Yes, there was discipline, but Christian discipline is out of love. Perhaps every night they would play together before bedtime. There was the usual routine – brush teeth, use the restroom, put on PJ’s, read books, say prayers, and go to sleep. As dad would tuck his son into bed, he would kiss him on the forehead and say, “I love you more than you know.” A tear of joy would fall from dad’s eyes in the darkness of that goodnight.

For years it would be the same routine. If you have children, then perhaps you know the feeling...the feeling that you can’t hold your child close enough. He was there. He loved that child more than anything in the world, but his world was going to be turned upside down.

“Dad, are you almost ready to go?” These words cut his heart. His love would be tested. Not his love for his son...but his love for God. This trip began because of God. “Abraham, go sacrifice your son for me.”

Could you do it? Looking at our lesson, it is a challenging lesson on which to preach. Jesus, the God of love, says: **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.** Can Jesus be serious? Isn’t hate a sin?! Why would he tell us to hate?

I thought to myself, “Maybe what Jesus is saying really isn’t...hate. Maybe it means something different.” But there was the Greek word. And it’s meaning? To dislike intensely, to feel an aversion to something, to detest, to love less. In other words...to hate! Jesus can’t really be saying that I should hate my mom and my dad? God couldn’t really have said to Abraham to go and sacrifice his one and only son, right?

How much do you love God? Compared to everything else, every ONE else, where does God rank? Is he always #1? Abraham was tested...show me how much you love me by sacrificing your son. (How long do you think it took for Isaac to get over that adventure?). Have you ever been tested?

Jesus, the God of love, tells us to hate something. So, that made me think...does God hate? If so, what does God hate? First reaction would probably be to say he hates the devil. True. They are eternal enemies who want the exact opposite things. But look again at this list Jesus tells us to hate – father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, my own life. Aren’t these blessings? These are tremendous blessings. Why would Jesus tell us to hate these things?

Well, what else then would God hate? He hates the devil, true. But is there more?

Thinking about the situation Jesus was in, we are told there was a large crowd following him. He was popular. He was liked, no...he was loved. But do you remember what God told Samuel when picking a king? Man looks at the outward appearance, God looks at the heart. Jesus could look into the heart of these people. Sure, they were following Jesus, but why? Did they really love Jesus? Or did they really love the idea of Jesus? Did they only follow him because he did great things for them? Did they love the miracles? Did they love the free food? Were they anxiously following Jesus because perhaps this is our earthly Messiah? Well, where was this large crowd when Jesus needed someone to speak on his behalf as he stood before Pilate? They were shouting, “Crucify!”

It is a shocking list of things, rather people, we should hate. But why hate this list? I suppose this list could have been just about anything. Jesus’ point? Well, that brought me back to anything else God would hate. To find the answer to that, I would ask...what does Jesus want? He tells us – he wants all to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. He wants all in heaven. And, therefore, anything which would get in the way of that will, I suppose he would hate. The devil is an obvious choice. But is there more? If there is anything at all getting in your way to get to salvation, you should rid yourself of that temptation. And nothing is excluded from your list. Maybe for you it is your father or mother or other relatives. Maybe they are making it completely impossible for you to believe. Maybe they have threatened to never talk with you again if you ever bring up Jesus in a conversation or if you continue to go to church. A very difficult situation.

Maybe for you, it is a different list. Maybe it isn't family members. Maybe it is your work. Have you ever made an excuse to not come to church because you had to work? Maybe you say, if I didn't go to work, I would lose my job. Would it be worse to lose your faith? Maybe your list would be sports. Do sports ever get in the way of your faith? Maybe your list includes a vacation. Have you ever skipped church because you were on vacation? Well, it is just one week we skipped. How comfortable did you get when you skipped church? Has it really just been one week?

Maybe your list would include your feelings inside. You preach the importance of forgiveness of sins, yet you find it hard to forgive that one person. Or you are the one who is slow to asking for forgiveness. Maybe your list would include the very money in your wallet. You would continue to love Jesus as long as that would not mean losing your possessions.

Is there anything in your life getting in the way of you loving God? If God asked me to give up any and everything for him, would I be able to do it?

Please don't misunderstand me. The purpose of this sermon as well as Jesus' words is NOT to say you must give up everything and hate everything in order to be a Christian. Absolutely not. In fact, I find my mother, father and siblings to be a tremendous blessing for me and for my faith. They have been extremely instrumental in my spiritual growth still to this day. But Jesus is saying to not let anything get in the way of you loving God and making him #1. Have you done that? Can you do that?

If there is anything in your life which is going to cause you to lose your faith, to lose your spot in heaven, then hate that, get rid of that.

This difficult lesson has really caused me to think. And, it has opened my eyes to see how quickly I haven't put God #1, how quickly I put anything before God and think my love for God is enough. Is loving God any less than 100% really loving God?

**Whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple... those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.**

Can we say a prayer quickly? Dear Heavenly Father, your Word strikes our hearts with the sharp penetrating power of your law. I want to love you with all my heart but find it difficult at times to put you #1 always. I deserve your punishment. I don't deserve to be called your child. But I bring my sin to Jesus, clinging to him, my rock, my salvation. Forgive me my numerous faults, Heavenly Father. Amen.

My friends, I can't carry my own cross. This lesson has been difficult for me because this lesson strikes my heart, and I feel like it probably strikes your heart too.

Well, it strikes God's heart too. Do you remember what I said was God's will? That all would be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Well, if the truth was that we are now completely lost forever and heaven is only a pipe dream, wouldn't that make God angry? It would be going against his will. So, he had to make sure that would not happen. Yes, God wants us to carry our cross to follow him, but Jesus wouldn't ask us to do something he already has not done. He carried his cross...rather, he carried my cross and yours. It was a heavy cross as my sins and your sins were nailed to it. Yet, he carried it so I could be his disciple, so you could be his disciple.

God never let anything get in his way to loving you. He sent Jesus. Jesus never let anything get in his way to loving you and getting to the cross. He went.

To God, grace was never cheap. We see the price God was willing to pay to give you grace and make you a part of his family. The price was his son. God the Father put you #1 by putting Jesus on the cross. Jesus Christ put you #1 by going to the cross. They paid the ultimate price to forgive you and love you. We needed that cross. We needed Jesus to go to the cross to forgive us, to love us.

And the beauty is...you are completely forgiven. You are completely loved.

I know, when we hear about the "Cross of the Christian" it may not bring a smile to your face immediately, but it can because Jesus carried the much more difficult cross of our sin. And now, what do we do? We carry our cross. We strive to put Jesus #1. We make God our priority. And when we fail? We have Jesus who put us #1. Thank you, God, for your love. Help us to love you always until you give us what Jesus earned for us...heaven. Amen.