

Sermon September 4, 2016, Pentecost 16

“Living Wide Awake”

Luke 14:25–35



Dear Friends in Christ!

Welcome in the name of Christ, our loving and dear Savior.

He is our loving and dear Savior, isn't he? Although, I'm not sure the Gospel reading for this morning assures us of his love and care. As you see, most people picture Jesus as a calm, nonthreatening, warm fellow. He doesn't get ruffled or easily agitated. However, the Jesus our Gospel reading shows us today is totally different, so get ready for it!

His call to be his disciple is radical as we shall see. First he calls to be humble, in last week's Gospel reading he said: "Anyone who exalts himself will be humbled."

They today, he says: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple" (v 26).

What? Is Jesus calling us to hate? Shocking isn't it. I though Jesus is a man of love and care! But instead he is calling us to hate the very people we were created to love, as per the fourth commandment. I don't get it, do you?

Now if we don't get it today, imagine the people who he was preaching to back then.

Really, what does it mean hate those whom you love? Surely Jesus wasn't speaking literally, was he?

Well, no he wasn't... but yes he was. Still confusing isn't it. Jesus explains it a little later, and his explanation has point to the tension, to imbalance of loyalties we live every day as disciples, the tension and imbalance of serving him only or our families or the things we love only. We can't do both, so Jesus calls us to a radical change. To decide truly who to follow, but whatever we do, our faith is going to change, radically!

And his radical change does hurt, doesn't it! We don't like it. Just as we don't like when we go the chiropractor to get our bodies aligned because our joints are out of alignment, but then after a few pushes and cracks we feel good again, but in the meantime the pushes and crucks hurt, and we don't like it.

But that's what Jesus is doing right now in our Gospels reading, using the word hate.

But notice that Jesus was not speaking to the 12 disciples only he was speaking those who have come to listen to him, young and old, to the whole crowd.

Now, as it usually happens with any crowd gathering around anything, the majority are there to watch and receive, but not to be involved. So is with the crowd following Jesus, of course they wanted to follow him, learn from him, but actually doing what Jesus was teaching them to do? Well that's another story. As Paul would later say in 2 Timothy 3:7, "always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth."

And I think those words describe this crowd to a T. They're interested but not committed. It's to this crowd that Jesus issues this shocking ultimatum: "Hate your father and mother, give up everything you have, take up your cross and follow me." In other words, Jesus is saying: "the life we are called to live in Christ demands our active and uncompromising participation." That's what Jesus means with the word hate.

Now what about us? How well do we fit Paul's description? Are we the same as the crowd following Jesus then? Because we have heard these words from Jesus, many times before, right? And? How is our discipleship? Are we acting and doing what he said we would do?

As it happens, it seems like we have been sleeping, or dozing off, nodding to the words of Jesus when we heard them, but that's it.

It's like a comedian said husbands do when their wives talk to them. They appear attentive, respond yes all the time, just to please their wives, but are they listening? Not really!

Now, imagine this, not that it has happened, but just imagine: A wife tells her husband "Honey I'm going to paint the living room," she says, "ok," the husband answers, "it's going to be pink, and a red set of sofas as well." :Yes honey!" He answers, "are you sure you are ok with it?" she asks, "yes honey!" Then one the way the husband comes home from work and what he finds? A pink Livingroom and a red set of sofa! And now he asks, "when did this happen? How did this happen? Hw you didn't consult with me?" Only then he wakes up and realizes what he was told and said yes to!

In the same way the crowd back then needed to wake up and realize what they were being taught. It was time for them to wake up and join the mission. Discipleship is not a spectator sport. It demands an active participation it demands you join the game not just being a fan.

However, this active participation has a cost to it, actually a double price.

First Jesus says, the price is loyalty: Jesus says, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." There's no easy way to hear these words. But as we said earlier, what Jesus means as he clarifies his reason for using the term In Lk 16:13 "hate," he says, "No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

We must have one or the other but not both and the time to make the choice is now, not later: To obey the call to put faith first, obedience first, Jesus first in life.

But how does obeying God first look like? It looks like living out our faith, sharing the Gospel, and defending the truth, even when the rest of the family or friends are asking us to tone it down, or to be quiet. It looks like standing up and speaking out the Gospel truth, even when we fear the consequences. It simply means putting in practice what we have learned from Jesus.

Now of course discipleship is not imposing our views, being rude or judgmental of others. Rather it means using the most effective weapon in the kingdom of God and that is love. We can't shout people into heaven, but we can't remain passive and silent and expect them to wake up to the truth either. The call of discipleship is costly, and today is the day to wake up and start living by boldly speaking the truth about our Savior

to those who do not know Jesus. And the time is now! Wake up and start living for the kingdom of God.

Now the second price tag to discipleship can be your very life, not just surrendering family and loved ones. Jesus says: "If anyone . . . does not hate . . . even his own life, he cannot be my disciple" (v 26).

As with our relationships, Jesus is not calling us literally to give away everything we have and to hate living. He is calling us to view all of God's good gifts from the steward's perspective. If I'm the owner, the well-being of my property and my relationships is dependent on my work and my diligence. This means my focus is on my stuff, but not focused on the things of God. By if I surrender ownership to Jesus, I then all I have to do is manage and care for his good gifts, but their safety and well-being are in God's hands, not mine.

And when I surrender everything to God then what I'm doing is aligning my priorities with God's priorities: people before stuff, eternal before temporal. And, here is another good news, it releases me from the anxiety and stress I experience because of my stuff.

Now that I can understand but... here is another shocking statement in Jesus calling us: "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple" (v 27).

Now, what does it mean "bear his cross"? For many of us it has meant many things. Some use it to refer to the heartache and pain they've suffered because of the loss of a loved one or because of illness, or other hardship in life. Others say that it refers to the call to evangelism, carrying the message of Christ's death and resurrection with us wherever we go. Now, those things, sure, are part of it, but there is more, it demands our very own lives.

As you see, Crucifixion, in Jesus' day, was a common form of punishment for the rebels who sought to overthrow Rome. It was not uncommon for the rebels to refer to the burden of their cause as a cross, for they knew that if they did not die in battle, they would likely die by crucifixion. They approached their cause with the belief that they were already dead men, and that death could possibly come through the cross.

Imagine what this challenge must have sounded like to the crowd. Jesus is not calling them to a figure of speech, people were literally being crucified along the roads between their towns for being insurrectionists. This was the worst possible death known at that time, but here is the problem, this kind, loving Rabbi is telling them that to follow him is to choose such a death, can you imagine that? While the challenge may be uncomfortable for us, it must have been terrifying for the crowd.

Now, that is a problem isn't it. Who in his right mind would end up on a cross? But that's what Jesus is calling us to. Obviously there is tension between Jesus radical call to follow him and us keeping it safe. But here is the truth, the tension happens not because the calls is difficult but because of our sin.

We were created to walk with God, to love God without distraction or compromise. But that stopped once Adam sinned! It is sin that puts two loves against each other. It is our weakness that drives us to love one and hate the other. Rather than blaming Christ for setting impossibly high standards, blame our sinful, broken lives that have made our separation from God seem normal.

But today, we rejoice, for the tension we feel in this challenge is a good thing. We rejoice that our life in Christ rests upon his perfect love, undivided devotion, and unwavering sacrifice. Jesus did what we could not do. Through his death on the cross, he defeated sin and conquered the grave. This victory and new life he gives to us as a gift. For in Baptism, our old nature was drowned, and we have been given new life in the Spirit (Rom 6:1–11). In this new life, by the Spirit, we find the will and the strength to follow Jesus with undivided attention and unwavering conviction of our life as a living sacrifice to God.

We rejoice knowing that the tension we feel is a reminder of the new life we have in Christ. Heaven is our home. Because of our new life in Christ, we are strangers in this world. If we were not born again through water and the Word, we would care little about Christ's call. But because we have been born again in the waters of baptism we do care about things of God, if we didn't before, let us heed the call, let us wake up! And let us rejoice because we were created to answer this call, to live lives focused on God, our Creator. You see, discipleship without singular focus, without sacrifice, without death—death to self and death to the flesh—is like salt that is no longer salty. "Salt is good," Jesus says, "but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is of no use either for the soil or for the manure pile" (vv 34–35a). It serves no purpose and offers no benefit. It is time for us to stop sleepwalking through our life, being passive spectators of the work of the kingdom of God. As Jesus turned to the crowds in the text, he now turns to you and me, not to put a burden on our shoulders but to invite us to set free the life given to us in Baptism by focusing our life on following Jesus without fear of consequence or challenge.

Today, Jesus calls us with unflinching clarity to take up a life of unwavering devotion to him and his kingdom mission, to surrender all as we take up our cross to follow him.

Amen.