

Sermon

Loyalty, Love and Priority

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Some of Jesus' teachings have such powerful resonance, we can't help but say Amen but today I think we to say, "Ouch"...What a profound challenge Jesus presents to us today. This is that moment when you are looking to buy something – let's say a car...and you wander around the lot, budget in your mind of what you would be able to spend and you start sensibly but then that shiny, cool car calls you over. The salesman approaches, offering the keys so you take it for a spin and you love it. And the reckoning – you hear the price and seems too high.

Today Jesus tells us the cost...the cost of this life. This life of faith that we are walking. "None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions." Seems a little steep. But that's the price. No negotiating, no wiggle room. Give up possession...

But what about the other comments Jesus made in this scripture?
"Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple."
The struggle here is obvious. This commentary from Jesus is in complete contrast with all others...love thy neighbor, you are a child of God who is protected and loved, and life? Isn't it a gift? Why would Jesus say these words? Why hate?

First we have to remember context and translation. From the Hebrew, hate may not be quite what is said...it is much more likely it is meant to be “love less”. And when you apply that small change, doesn’t it make this a bit clearer? In the time of Luke, family was survival. You did not go it alone – you needed to be in a family dynamic both just physical survival and social acceptance. So you can imagine that people of the time, and some of this still translates today, place too heavy of an importance on being loyal to other humans and that this could lead to following hate or cruelty.

If you simplify what Jesus is saying about our faith and how we follow Jesus, it is simply loyalty, love and priority.

Loyalty – what comes to mind when you hear that word? Does it make you think of your closest relationships? Perhaps spouse or committed loved one? Parent? Sibling? Friend? Was Jesus the first thought? I am loyal to Jesus...perhaps. I think we perceive loyalty on a human level far too much. Maybe we are loyal to a job, to our country, to our neighborhood? Are we loyal to our faith? To our church? To the mission work?

Love- Jesus speaks of love so often but in this sense he comes at it ironically but talking about hate and hating the things that we all genuinely love. Love of God – love of our journey into spirit – focusing our lives on growing our ability to feel and understand our purpose, our rhythm, our belonging. Do we really understand how much we are loved? Do we truly appreciate that God has set us in a vibration of love and allows us to make choices that can please us, that will fulfill us. And in a place that is so utterly

beautiful and mysterious and immense. In this scripture though the love Jesus is referencing is love of our relationship with him.

And that love, leads to priority. Do we truly prioritize our relationship with God? Do we do that or do we fit in when it works for us or is comfortable and easy. For you, you are here or you're watching so it is a priority. Do you look at opportunities for growth in this regard as something you must do or something that if it works for me, I will. There are opportunities coming up here at this church and I hope that you make them a priority. That is there is a conflict, you move it aside. Not because you have to or because your pastor is asking you to, but because what Jesus says makes sense. It's an investment, it's a priority. Life will send us into a battle – "What king going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand." If you want to be the king who prepares, you gotta do the work. Read the books, join the discussion group, meditate and pray, and if you don't know how to do it, learn.

Jesus says, "Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." The cross—the Roman method of execution—is used, shockingly, to speak about following the way of Jesus. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "The cross is laid on every Christian."² Said differently, the cross cannot be bypassed on the road to discipleship.

To sum this scripture up, Jesus is telling us to make a choice. It's that simple – choose what resonates and is important. And may your life reflect that.

Inspired by workingpreacher.org commentary on Deuteronomy 30:15-20 by Rev Kiyong Jin Lee and commentary on Luke 14:25-33 by Rev E. Trey Clark.

Our scripture from Deuteronomy is also about choice. “See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity.” “If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees and ordinances, than you shall live and become numerous.” If not, it goes on to say, we will perish. Choosing rightly. This command does not remove our human ability to make decisions and discern what is right, it deepens it and it transforms it into a spirit enabled vocation.

The prophets Jeremiah and Ezekial helped the people understand this change, this shift from when commandments were on tablets and now, that way of life has been written on our hearts. This powerful spirit within us is the divine leading us to make choices and to endure the hardest moments not from what we learn, but from what we feel and know from within. It’s no longer just about our own strength or willpower. It’s about God empowering us through His Spirit to walk with Him, to desire what He desires, and to live in step with His heart.

Paul’s ministry is filled with this perspective. Our freedoms do not come from human morality, these are signs of a life being animated by God’s presence. What the Deuteronomic covenant required is now made possible by divine empowerment. The moral choice—still real, still urgent—is now made within a different framework. The believer is not left to agonize between options from a position of isolation, but is summoned into a living relationship in which the very act of choosing is made possible by grace.

Now our human responsibility still remains – we must use our knowledge, intelligence and wisdom to make decisions, choices in how we react and live, on the contrary, the freedom the Spirit grants is a freedom for faithfulness. It is a liberation from fear, sin, and self-enclosure, not a detachment from responsibility. The will is not bypassed but restored to its true purpose: to love, trust, and respond to God.

When we fail to respond to our calling – when we don't make Jesus our priority, we fall into a lower version of ourselves and it can be painful when we do. We will suffer anxiety had a much higher level, confusion, contemplation that is all human – based, not allowing spiritual guidance and leadership.

You see, Jesus used those strong words to warn us and to encourage us. We are already wired into the divine – it is part of us, so to deny it, is to deny ourselves and who we actually are. But Jesus would not have said this in this manner if he did not already know how susceptible we are to distraction and confusion. What you need to factor in is that there is a darkness at work all the time. It cannot be ignored. The army of twenty thousand is out there, suiting up. You need to be writing your war plan – how you are going to combat what is presented or what obstacles are in your way when you discern and feel you must move in a particular direction.

What is assured us is that we will never be asked to do any of this alone. That God has indeed sent God's army – God's angels to protect, to resolve, to love, to lead and to carry us whenever it is needed. But it is up to us how we nurture that relationship isn't it. Loyalty, love and priority...

The spirit is always at work within us – quietly, persistently and at times unnoticed. When we choose compassion over indifference, generosity over greed, love over hate, prayer over scrolling – we choose a life that is a new kind of freedom—one that is not self-asserted but Spirit-shaped.

Today is a great day to shift your priorities – to answer the call or to let go of something you have been holding onto – trying to figure it all out, trying to make that plan but the information is just not available yet – to look for the answer in the quietness, in the silence, in the unknowing – but understanding all will be well and that you are safe.

So as we leave this place today, let's remember: choosing life isn't just about following a list of rules or checking off spiritual boxes. It's about opening ourselves to the presence of God—letting His Spirit shape us, guide us, and breathe life into us. It's about living in a way that brings life to others, that reflects the love and grace we've received.

The freedom the Spirit gives isn't about doing whatever we want—it's about being empowered to respond to God's call, to serve with joy, and to love with abandon. That's the kind of life that speaks louder than words. That's the kind of life that shows the world who God is.

So may we go from here as living testimonies—individually and together—to the God who still chooses life, who still chooses us, and who is still writing His story through ours.

Amen.