

Scripture: Luke 14: 25-33 Summit Mennonite, October 5, 2014

We have looked at the concept of covenant, starting with God's promise to Abraham and his lifetime of waiting before finally having a beloved son in his old age. We learned that God is faithful throughout our lives, even when our covenants are broken, citing both Abraham and Sarah and Hagar and Ishamel. Today we have scripture that was near and dear to the hearts of our Anabaptist ancestors, a scripture that grates on a literal rendering and begs for a logical explanation, especially in a country where family is right under God in priority.

While this passage was strangely comforting to early Anabaptists who were already separated from their extended families, it is hard, even jolting to our modern ears. When we hear these words about hating our family we are sure that Jesus was speaking figuratively, not literally, and according to Jewish and Greek oratorical tradition, he was.

Let's look at the ancient cultures of Jesus' day. The Greeks had oratory at the center of their culture and the Aramaic and Palestinian cultures, though much more rural, paid attention to a great Rabbi who could speak to crowds with skill and authority. Jesus drew huge crowds because of this gift, coupled with his amazing healing miracles. The crowd that was pressing in on him wanted to get in on the hoopla. They wanted to be a part of this wonderful new and exciting movement. This was the euphoric crowd mentality that troubled Jesus to the point that he pulled out a technique that would stop people in their tracks and whittle down the massive crowds to a few faithful disciples that followed him on the way to Jerusalem. He exaggerated for effect and he spoke in hyperbole.

“If any of you come to Me without hating your own father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, and yes, even your own life, you can't be My disciples.” The pairing of opposites was common as an oratorical technique of that day. The writer of *The Leader*

magazine writes: “In Jesus’ day, the way you stated a preference was by pairing two things and saying that you loved one and hated the other. It had nothing to do with an emotional feeling of actually hating something, but was rather a matter of stating priorities.”

Jesus is continuing to challenge Jewish ideas about the Kingdom of God- who will be in it and how it will work. He not only challenges the religiously honored and privileged of the religious Jews, he also challenged individuals to take stock of their own personal value systems. Were their own individual lives or their families of greater value than their devotion to Christ? Were they willing to give up their families and even die for Christ? “Matthew 10:37-38 reads: “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; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. “

Remember that the gospels were written *after* the destruction of Jerusalem in AD70, with the possible exception of Mark, written just before it in and around AD 65. So both Matthew and

Luke were written in a time of great persecution and suffering in the small Christian world. These words were heard (and remember that when these gospels were written and shared, it was *one* person reading and the rest listening)-these words were heard by people who were likely already estranged from their biological families. Barbara Brown Taylor, in her book, *Bread of Angels*, wrote “In Luke’s time, it was the custom for whole households to adopt the faith of their heads. Everyone in the house was compelled to believe what that person at the top believed (most likely a male). So spouses, children, servants, donkeys-everyone- was to follow the beliefs and religious practices of the head of the household”.

So are you getting the picture? Followers of Christ back then were choosing voluntarily to separate themselves from their families, to choose FOR THEMSELVES a life of suspicion, and if they were male heads of families, they were choosing for their whole families this life. Caesar was NOT the one to whom they chose allegiance. Neither did they choose to follow the traditional Jewish

establishment. It was Christ whom they followed and He had died at the hands of the Roman Empire, in collusion with the Jewish theological establishment. Are you getting a picture of just how *radical* this was in their day? And so the reading of this scripture passage must have been comforting- soothing- for them, to know that Jesus understood that people would be dying for their faith, just as He had done, that people would have to sacrifice all for the sake of the Kingdom.

Now you can understand *why* this particular passage was dear to early Anabaptists, who had family members missing or killed, after being tortured for their faith.

Story of Dirk Willems

What is the meaning of this scripture and this story for us today?

Well, we do live in an empire many have compared to that of Rome. Jesus calls us to hail him Lord of all”, as we sing, instead of

America, instead of capitalism or money as lords, not to claim our busy-ness, not to claim our beautiful children as lord. And this is not an easy thing that Jesus asks of us...but still, he asks. And I do believe that we can be good citizens of the United States while at the same time, being separate in our theology and our actions. How long these freedoms will remain a possibility is yet to be seen.

You've heard me make the comparison of our culture to frogs being place in a pot of water. As the heat is gradually turned up, the frogs become more and more acclimated to higher and higher temperatures until they die. Is it the same with us as we live in our culture of greed and comfort? Are we called to jump out of that pot of water, which, when the heat of Americans' gods of comfort and security, are turned gradually up, so that we are not slowly cooked? We don't like to sit in discomfort. And the process of cooking is very slow and insidious. Where is the line? Are you willing to, for example, lose your job, your 401K? If it were a clear "either/or" question, (the gospel or death), our choices would be so

much easier. In that sense, I think it might have been clearer- not easier, but clearer- in the 1500's. We are taught to run away from anything uncomfortable. This- whatever it is that keeps you from living the passionate commitment of being a Jesus-follower. Aren't we all called to such a commitment?

In the unprogrammed Friends meetings, everyone in the entire congregation signs the marriage certificate of a couple getting married. Everyone in that body commits to being a part of the marriage, in participating in the spiritual lives of that couple. I find that refreshing in that it is a group commitment. What sign do we have that is done together?

Today we are about to welcome _____ into official membership in our community of believers. We have celebrated over breakfast and fellowship, and they will take home a bright mum. But we also commemorate this occasion with holy communion together. This is a sign of our unity and our belief as a

body, as well as individual beliefs, that we commit ourselves to this radical life to which our Savior, Christ, calls us.

The poem, in the form of WHB#535 “Who now would follow Christ” goes like this: (Read hymn text here.)

May God give us the gumption, the determination, the will to jump out of a culture of comfort and accept the radical, uncomfortable, sacrificial life to which Christ calls us- individually, and as a Body.

Prayer:

Father, change us, heal us, convict us so that we are transformed by the words we have heard from Luke today. May both the discomfort and promise of these words of Jesus go with us. May they blow through our lives, our lives together, nudging us to release those things that hold us captive, so we might have **new** life and have it abundantly. Amen.