



St. Luke's East Hampton

Sermon Preached by the Rev. Benjamin Shambaugh

September 7, 2025: Proper 18C: [Jeremiah 18:1-11](#); [Philemon 1-21](#); [Luke 14:25-33](#)

Last weekend I was in Maine for a wedding and had the opportunity to drive by my old house. My house is in a kid-centric neighborhood, just a few blocks from an Elementary school, a Middle School, a High School, a college, and a public library. This time of year, the sidewalks are filled with parents walking little ones to school and older kids wandering in groups with full backpacks on their backs. I don't know about you, but my Facebook feed has been full of photos of children on the first day of school: the first day of kindergarten, the first day of Senior Year, and even move-in day at college. One set of emoticons with those posts showed tears, followed by comments wondering where the years had gone. Another equally honest one showed a smiley face and an expression of joy that their 18-year-old had finally moved out of the house! Each of these parents recognized the beginning of the school year as a time of transition, the end of an era and the beginning of a new one. Each of those parents recognized that, whether it was kindergarten or college, their child needed to leave the nest – go on to the next stage – in order to be or become who they were called to be.

This, I believe, is the theme of this morning's readings. The passage I just read is particularly challenging. Before I dive in, I would like you to have two things in mind. First, things like hyperbole was very common in the Middle Eastern world of Jesus' day. You can see remnants of this in the custom practice of haggling, in which a seller first offers an outrageous price but soon settles on something more reasonable. Jesus himself often used exaggeration to make a point. To take Jesus' words literally is to misunderstand Semitic culture. The second thing to remember is that Jesus spoke Aramaic, not Biblical Greek and that sometimes meaning can get a little lost in translation. In this morning's passage, for example, the Greek word "miseo" (think "misery") is sometimes translated using the English word "hate." "Miseo" however is a Greek translation of a Hebrew and Aramaic word which means "love less than!" [1] This is made clear in a passage in Genesis 29:30 where this same Hebrew word is used to describe how Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah. Though some English translations say that Leah was hated, from the context it is very clear that Leah was still loved, just a little less. Recognizing this nuance, a better translation of this morning's gospel (Matt 10:27-38) might have Jesus saying, "He who loves father and mother more than me is not worthy of me." After yesterday's wedding, the father of the bride was talking about his little girl growing up. She still loved her parents and they obviously loved her, but she was beginning a new stage of life in which her priority would be her new partner and the family they would build together. For that father and daughter, it's not even about loving less.

It's love in a new way. By the way, there is another Greek word used in the Bible, "kataphroneó"[2] or "to despise" -- which is closer in meaning to the English word hate. The use of "miseo" instead shows that today's text is about a hierarchy of love -- not what we think of as "hate."

Do you get the point? Though the scripture says "hate," it isn't talking about hate! Jesus is saying that if we are to fly, we will need to leave the nest. Jesus is saying that in order to be a disciple, in order to develop into who we have been created to be, we need to put a priority on loving God, loving ourselves, and becoming who and what God has called us to be. Remember that a disciple is a student. Jesus is telling the disciples that the school year is beginning, that it's time to put on their backpacks and go to class, and that the first step in doing that is leaving their families and comfort zones behind. This new stage isn't easy. The gospel describes the costs of building a tower and winning a war. When Peter said "Lord we have left everything to follow you," Jesus replied ""Truly I tell you," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields...and in the age to come eternal life." (Mark 10:29-30) Jesus does ask his disciples to take up their crosses. He does this recognizing that the challenges they are currently facing and the burdens they are carrying are only temporary. Crucifixion leads to the resurrection and that the cross leads to a new life beyond anything they can imagine. The same is true for us. In asking us to take up our crosses, Jesus is inviting us to begin our own journey to that resurrected life.

In our second reading, Paul writes Philemon about a slave named Onesemus who had become his friend in prison. Paul is asking Philemon to break the norms and expectations of his culture and treat Onesemus not as a slave but as an equal, as a brother. More than that, Paul is asking Philemon to send Onesemus back to him as a companion and a son. Philemon was perfectly in his rights to do none of this. Slavery was legal. Paul is asking Philemon to go to the next level anyway. Paul's point is that following Jesus requires sacrifice, sacrifice which for Philemon might entail financial, personal, social, and even familial costs. Paul is asking Philemon to go beyond the law and live out his faith with radical acts of kindness and love.

The reading from Jeremiah hits this point from a different direction. Jeremiah was writing during a time of great anxiety. The king had died, and the country of Judah was descending into a chaotic time that would end with the destruction of Jerusalem and the taking away of the entire people of Israel into exile in Babylon. In the midst of trying to make sense of it all, Jeremiah had a vision of God as a potter reshaping his people and his nation at the same time. Jeremiah used that image to call his readers and his leaders to action. He recognizes the risk, and the sacrifices needed to do this. He also recognized that the survival of his people and his nation was at stake. The good news is that God the potter was already at work, molding and shaping them into something new.

Even for those who have not been in school for decades, September is still a time of new life, excitement and opportunity. It is time to start up and recommit again to the discipline of being disciples: students and followers of Jesus. God the potter is already at work. It is time for us to get to work as well, to take our faith to the next level, to leave our nests and comfort zones and begin to fly.

[1] <http://apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=6&article=781>
<http://www.tektonics.org/gk/jesussayshate.php>

[2] <https://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/19054/is-there-a-greek-word-matching-the-concept-of-hate-unlike-luke-14-26>