

190908 Fr. Neal Longe

Let us pray

We give you thanks and praise for this day for your blessing and presence in each of our lives. And we pray that your Holy Spirit would open our hearts to hear your voice this morning. May your word be spoken and your word received in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

We have once again a challenging teaching of Jesus in this gospel passage. And I'm sure even as we're hearing it, we question well, what's that all about? Because in many ways it doesn't seem to make sense that Jesus is addressing the crowd by saying, well, if you want to follow me, then hate your family, hate your friends, hate your kids and you scratch your head and you think, what do you do with that? When the greatest commandment is to love God with your whole heart and to love your neighbor as yourself? And we think so, which is it? Are we supposed to be loving? Or hating? You've got to pick one. You can't have both. But this is a good lesson for us as we wrestled through the last several weeks have been scriptures that we've had to wrestle with. What is the point that Jesus is trying to make?

Because that's how we have to understand this scripture. When we read it, we can not just take this and well, it says right here, Luke 14, 26 hate your father and mother right there in the Bible. That's the command. That would be a misuse of the text of the scripture and it would be read in an inappropriate way, which is the danger anytime you want to just pick your favorite thing and say, well the Bible says and just pluck out a verse and there you go. Cause I guarantee you, you could find a verse to make it say anything you want and justify the most horrific thing and say, well it says it in the Bible. And so as followers of Jesus, we have to use the texts that we have appropriately and we have to read it appropriately and we have to understand where Jesus is going with this. And so thankfully we have the whole thought that he has and he's certainly not commanding us that we should hate one another, that we should hate our family. That in following Jesus you should throw out everybody connected to you and follow Jesus..

But as he finishes the verse or the section that we had read, even that is he says, well, you cannot follow me unless you give up all your possessions. Well raise your hand if you've given up all your possessions. And even if you could do that, well what does that even mean to give up all your what? That's the question we would ask next. Right? Well, what's a possession? Are we allowed to have shoes or not? Can you have clothes or not? Is it just a big house like that's a possession or too much money's the possession or even you look at religious communities and they take a vow of poverty and they personally have no possessions but the order they belong to still does. I mean somebody has to own this stuff. Is there a way that we could live without anything.

I suppose there is, but is that Jesus's point too, like you're, you're not following Jesus. If you have money in your checkbook or you own a car that disqualifies you, that's not his point. And we can take this verse and use it as a weapon against one another and say, well, that's what it means, but we've missed what Jesus is saying because the same thing about hate your father and mother and give up all your possessions. What he's trying to get us to understand is that in following him, he must be first and we have to be willing to surrender at his feet our entire life, which includes our family relationships, our friendships, our spousal relationships, our money, our houses, our jobs. We lay everything at his feet, not because God desires to take it away and have you live a miserable life ever after.

And that's what it means to follow him. But we surrender our whole life at his feet. And what he does is he remakes and transforms our whole life and remakes and transforms our jobs and our family relationship and reorders everything in the right priority and makes it new in him so that in fact, it's actually an infinite number of times better in Christ than if we just held onto the possession on our own or we had the worldly relationships on our own. That's Jesus' point, because if you try to make the first argument about hate your father and your mother or you couldn't have any possessions, I'd like to have you try to show me how that lines up with what we know in the rest of the scripture about a god who created us because he loves us, who desires us to be with him, who over and over to try to win us back to himself and promises a day when Jesus will return again so that we can live in his presence forever.

That's the large theme of the Salvation Work of God for us people and everything you read in the Bible, you have to fit in that stream, and if you don't, then I would challenge, you're not reading the texts, right, because you can't say that in that overarching theme that you could justify saying, well, hate your children, hate your family. They can't fit together. In that stream you can say, God challenges us to prioritize those relationships that he is supreme and that in him, everything else gets made new for his purpose for that dwelling with him for eternity. You can say that, and when you fit the two together, then you say, I have read the texts correctly because that fits in that larger narrative, and this is a caution we have to see every time we open this book because I know we've all done it and we've all heard people do it, where we just pluck something off a page and make it a universal principle that in fact is the exact opposite of the salvation narrative. And we think, well, it says in the Bible, but we have to use the Bible correctly. Or we say that it says things that it never meant to say, but we say because it's in the ink. But we have to get at what Jesus means, not just what the ink says and how does it fit in the story. Because then we see it makes sense because Jesus over and over again he's talking about those who cannot be my disciple. And even then we have to understand that the invitation of Jesus is not just a sort of wave to him on the road one day and say, Yep, you did that thing for me wonderful. Can you stamp my ticket here so that I know I'm all good when I get to the gate and go about my life?

That's not the salvation narrative either. That's not the Bible story. Relationship is. So to be a disciple is to put your life under the teacher, to follow after them and to emulate your life after him and your thought after him. That's what it means to be a disciple in that day. Not only in following Jesus, but if you were following some other teacher or you would be their disciple, your whole life goes into trying to emulate them. That's what Jesus is saying. So in that way, he's saying, well, if all these other things are going to take the priority of me and are going to sit in the chair that I should sit in, then you can't be my disciple because I need to be in my rightful place as Lord. And then everything else will flow out of that. Our own life flows out of that.

He's not saying, well, hate your life. What do you mean he created it so how are we supposed to hate the thing that he created. It wouldn't make sense, but it does make sense that my life flows out of following Jesus, not in place of him where I'm independent. And the same thing as he says, well take up your cross and follow him or you can't be his disciple. Now, that doesn't mean that Jesus just wants us to have like horrible lives where we suffer all the time and we hear people say, we'll take up your cross as if we're looking for as much suffering as possible and can we make it as terrible as possible and please just give me the heaviest cross of all and then I'll follow. I'll follow Jesus. Well, come on. How does that fit with the rest of the story?

He is saying, take up your whole life, the good in the bad and you got to come after me and there will be struggles. Jesus is acknowledging that it's not just going to be, come follow me and you're on the streets of gold and easy street for the rest of your life. We all know that's not true. There are struggles. That's taking up our cross and walking with Jesus in the blessing and the heartache of life and letting him change and transform our life and our life to flow out of him. That's what it means to be a disciple and then we can lay our whole life, our possessions at his feet. That doesn't mean we can't have any or that we shouldn't value our family relationships, but blessed by Jesus ordered appropriately. Look how much better those are. Look at the life that then flows into our possessions, into our jobs, into our workplaces, into our families that flows out of Christ through us into those.

That's the change and transformation that Jesus is looking for. And I think as we look at it like that, then this becomes good news, which is the gospel. If the good news is hate your family, hate your life, pick up your cross and suffer after me for all eternity. Who wants to sign up? Nobody is looking for that. But that doesn't line up with who God says he is and what he's come to do. The good news is things are better in God. So bring your whole life at his feet not because he's trying to take it away, but he's trying to transform it and he's making it better than you can even imagine. So what are we afraid of? But we want to be our own God and we want to be Lord and we want to call all the shots and we need to get off that seat.

That's what Jesus' is saying. We're the disciple, the one who comes after that, we do it much like we lead Jesus around on the leash and say, come over here. This is the thing I'm doing now. Now tell me how wonderful it is and bless this over here and he's trying to walk this way. Then we just yank, we're over here. Jesus, come over here and do this thing. Stop looking over there. Come over here with me. I know best. That doesn't line up either. You know, and this is why I say it's so important that we open the Bible because we have to know what it says or we get screwy ideas. And we have

to read it appropriately or we get screwy ideas. And we all know there's plenty of screwy Bible ideas out there that they just say, well, it says. Well, you've got to explain that and you should be able to articulate why you think it says that and how it fits in the big story. And if it doesn't fit in the big story, you ought to scratch your head and say, well wait a minute, is that really a good way to use this text or have I manipulated that for my own thought process. These are the questions we have to ask ourselves. And this is what makes us nervous about reading the Bible. Because we'd rather have it just be like an instruction manual for assembling a bicycle. And you just do one two three four five no questions, you just do all the things. But that's not how, that's not what God gave us. We have a book that says we got to wrestle with this. And you have to say, how does this fit into what, who I know God is and what he's saying about what he's done for us.

And then we make our interpretation of the text. Don't ever just say, well it says right there in the ink cause you're, you're gonna find some very screwy things that way and you're going to find questions you can't answer until that doesn't make sense then, who is this God. And so it's gotta fit in that story and I pray that we'll grasp today what Jesus is calling us to because it's not a life of suffering. It's an invitation to blessing and transformation in him. If we'll just lay our lives down, if we'll surrender our jobs and our possessions and put everything under him and then follow him, trusting that it's okay to let him lead the way and where he's going is better and stop trying to lead him around to whatever we think is the greatest idea. To follow him and in Him we'll find everything if we just give it up. That control we want to have and everything will work out better.

Life will look better in the end. We know a place is prepared for us. Our sins are forgiven. Jesus will return again. There will be a new creation. These are all the things that are await us, so let go the control. In case we haven't figured it out anyway. I can't fix it anyway. I can't control all the things I think I can. It's all in illusion about all the things we think we control. Just let it go and follow after Jesus and his promise is to lead us and guide us because we know the big story. We know who god is and we need not fear that surrender. And in fact, we'll find that we're pleasantly surprised that our life turns out beyond what we can ask or imagine when we just follow him.

Let us pray. Father, we thank you for your blessing upon each of us, for your presence with us and we pray that your Holy Spirit would lead us and guide us each day as we follow your son, Jesus, as our Lord and our savior. May Our lives be transformed. May we surrender our whole being, everything, all of our relationships, our money, our houses, our jobs, whatever it is, we surrender it all at your feet and we follow behind you as the disciple. May Your spirit correct us when we get out in that place of the leader when we should be following. And as we study your word day in and day out, may our eyes and our hearts be open to, to the large story of salvation that our interpretation of the text before us may always be in light of that large story of how you've, you've come to save us and call us to you and may our lives be lived to your honor and your glory. And Jesus, we ask this in your precious and holy name. Amen.