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September 5, 2010  
Luke 14: 25-33

### **“Really, Jesus?”**

This past week Tommy complained of an itchy throat and runny nose. “It’s probably allergies,” I told him. So I gave him some Benadryl and sent him off to school. When he got home that afternoon he said he felt a lot better at school but not so great at home. “I think I’m allergic to something here,” he said. “Could be,” I said. And then joked, “May be you’re allergic to Baby.” Baby, for those of you who don’t know, is our beloved Black Labrador. And Tommy loves Baby. “It could be a tough decision,” I continued. “I mean, do we keep you or Baby?” “Yeah,” Julia joked. “That could be a hard decision.” And then she said, “Don’t worry Tommy, I’m just kidding.”

But then, in all seriousness, she said, “But you know, *Baby is our dog, and we’ve had her a really long time.*” To which Tommy replied, Uh, Julia, I’m you’re brother!”

So Jesus said to the crowd gathered around, “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even life itself, cannot be my disciples.”

Those are really difficult words to hear, don’t you think? Aren’t you glad you came today? Now you know why I didn’t talk about my sermon topic in the weekly e-mails and solely focused on the music and Gay’s arrival. Jesus telling us all to hate our families doesn’t exactly draw in the masses, does it now? I don’t think I’ve ever preached on this passage, which doesn’t at all surprise me because if following Jesus requires me to hate my family, I just know I couldn’t that.

But, do you think that’s what he meant? Does Jesus really expect us to hate our families in order to follow him? Most of the commentators I read said no, that’s not what Jesus meant. It’s just hyperbole. But, for the sake of argument, let’s take him at his word. For the sake of argument, let’s say he meant exactly what he said.

Well, that makes us stop, doesn't it? All of a sudden we stop to consider what, exactly, this life of following Christ is going to cost. We begin to seriously consider if this is something we really want to do and can do.

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At this point in Jesus' ministry, there were a lot of people following him. It wasn't at all unusual for large crowds to gather in the towns and villages he entered. People knew he could perform miracles, so some of them wanted to see that. Other people probably liked to see him spar with the religious leaders. And some people probably thought he was really cool. But there were doubtless many, many people in that crowd who thought he was on a victory march to Jerusalem. They knew what the Hebrew Scriptures said about the Messiah-how he'll defeat their enemies and release all of them from everything that oppresses them-and they liked that message. After all, everyone wants to be on the winning side, right?

But then he tells them that following him will come at a high cost, and that doesn't sound so fun. Hating their family and life and giving up all of their possessions doesn't sound much like a victory march.

It's almost like Jesus is trying to winnow out the wannabes and the hangers-on. Read the fine print, he seems to be saying. Consider the consequences of your decision. He even tells them, sit down and consider what this is going to cost you. Add it up. After all, you do that with every other aspect of your life, why would you not do that when it comes to this aspect of your life?

And that's so true, isn't it? We don't take on a commitment to a new organization or club without first considering what is expected of us. If we're signing up for the PTO, we want to know how much time it's going to take. If we're signing up for a new membership somewhere, we want to know how much it's going to cost us. If we're thinking about taking on a new job, we want to know what the responsibilities are. When I'm trying to make a difficult decision, I'll often go through a list of pros and cons and consider the consequences of my decision.

But for some reason, when it comes to following Jesus, we don't do this. We don't stop to think that following him may cost us something, like the love of our families or losing our possessions. How many churches peddle Jesus like they're selling a used car? Plenty do-we see many of them on TV.

They make it sound like following Jesus is the easiest thing ever and, if you do follow him, great things are in store for you-which for most of them mean money and expensive things.

But they aren't the only guilty ones. I know many religious leaders-and I'm probably one of them, who have, in many ways, domesticated Christianity to the point that it's easy and comfortable, and I think the reason we do this is because we don't offend anyone. I was talking about this passage with one my colleagues just last Thursday at our presbytery meeting. They wanted all of us to get in small groups and talk about this passage and somehow our conversation came around to bringing up politics in our sermons. Now, you all know that I've touched on politics plenty in my sermons, and I hope the older I get the better I get at trying to keep my foot out of my mouth. She said she never brings up politics because she doesn't think it's her place to tell her members how to vote or what side of the issue to side with.

Well, I don't either. But I do think that it's my job to get you to think about how being a disciple effects all areas of your life, not only your spiritual life. Because being a disciple of Christ isn't only about praying and reading your Bible and coming to church. It's a lot more than that. Your faith shouldn't be something you only think about on Sunday, it's something you should think about all the time and be the very foundation of your life. I think this is what Jesus is telling us today, and I think if we can't have a serious discussion about that well, I'm just another preacher soft peddling Jesus and making his words easy and comfortable.

But I don't think Jesus' words are always easy and comfortable. His words today aren't easy and comfortable, so why try to soft peddle them? Sometimes what Jesus says, and what he asks us to do or believe, tests our loyalties-our loyalties to our family, our city, our country, the church, the flag, and our friends.

Sometimes what he says we should do and believe create tensions-and not only with other people, but within ourselves.

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I, for one, have been very torn about the issue of the NYC mosque. I know they have a right to build there and I would never want to take that right away, but I also can totally understand why people don't want it there. But

as a Christian, I don't think the issue is that black and white, so I find there is a tension within myself concerning it.

This past week a NYC taxi driver was repeatedly stabbed because he appeared to his assailant to be Muslim. Most people would agree that the crime was heinous, which it was. But as Christians, do we leave it at that and walk away? Or do we speak up and take a stand that says, "Not all Muslims are terrorists,"-which isn't a very popular position these days- and try to be a voice of reason in a dialogue that has been taken over by extremists on both sides?

People like to think that following Jesus can be reduced down to a simple moralism that paints life as black and white. But I don't think it's that easy; and I think following Jesus means more than just being nice. I think there are plenty of nice people in the world who don't follow Jesus.

I think there will come times in our lives, if they haven't happened already, that we may be asked to make some decisions and do things that are really unpopular and may put us at odds with our families-hence Jesus' admonition to hate your family.

I think there will come times in our lives, if they haven't happened already, in which we may be asked to take up our crosses, and perform a service or make a sacrifice for someone or something that we really don't want to do or may be very unpopular-hence Jesus' admonition to take up our cross.

And I think there will come times in our lives, if they haven't happened already, in which we will be asked to give something up, something that we deeply treasure perhaps-hence Jesus' admonition to give away all of our possessions.

Look, I don't want to make you all feel like following Jesus is drudgery. Because I don't think it is. I think that 99.9% of the time it's actually great fun. But I do think all of us will, at some point, be faced with a difficult decision to make that will test our loyalties, for as much as we want to think that following Jesus means finding personal fulfillment or discovering inner peace, it's a lot more than that. Following Jesus means swimming upstream against the ordinary current of loyalties to the point of reprioritizing those loyalties that might normally claim first place.

Because following Christ isn't something we do just some of the time, or when it's convenient or popular or when it's noncontroversial. It's something we do all of the time-not just on Sunday morning, but Monday-Saturday, too.

Do we want to follow? The early Christians were known and called "people of the way." It is still true. It is a way -- of living, of life, of commitment, of challenge, but also of grace, of hope, and of love. The call of Jesus is a call for loyalty -- to follow not when it's convenient, not when it's popular, not when it's easy. But to follow him into the world where we now become his hands and feet for compassion, his voice for justice and mercy, his arms for reconciliation, and his heart for the hurting, the hungry, the weak, and the vulnerable.

I think that is a call worth following and one that deserves all our loyalties.

Amen.