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Sermon 16 August 2020

JSW 2: And Then Jesus Says WHAT About Parents?

- Luke 14: 25 Now large crowds were travelling with him; and he turned and said to them, 26 ‘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. 27 Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. 28 For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? 29 Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, 30 saying, “This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.” 31 Or 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? 32 If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. 33 So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.
- AUDIO: (announcer) It’s time to gather your friends and family, get out your Bibles and your sermon notes, and open your hearts and minds, because this is the second Sunday in a sermon series called “and then, Jesus says what?”
- Good morning. We are so glad to have you with us on this beautiful Sunday morning—or whenever it is that you’re joining us—you know one of the

remarkable things about this technology is that we can be gathered together in this virtual space, from all across different times and places, but the Spirit is present with us, and binds us together in the love of God—and I hope this morning that you are keenly aware of the presence of the Spirit right there with you, where you are as you listen and respond, and worship with us. (Thanks for praying for Pastor Tasha)

- Today is the second Sunday in our sermon series that's called "and then, Jesus said what?" and what we are doing in this sermon series is, over 8 weeks, we are looking at, and thinking about, and studying together, some difficult statements that are ascribed to Jesus in the gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These are quotations, things Jesus says, maybe as he's teaching, maybe in response to a question, maybe just in conversation with an individual, but these are things that Jesus says that, when taken out of context, can be a bit bewildering, or out of character, or maybe just plain hard to understand.
- We might ask "does Jesus really say that?" And if He does, why? How does that make sense?
- And we're dealing with these quotations in Scripture and as we do, I believe that we are going to learn some things about how we answer the question, "What does this mean?" when we find things in the Bible that might not be easy to comprehend, things that are not simple or straightforward, but complex and challenging.
- And so we began last week by looking in Matthew's gospel, chapter 10, and the title of the sermon was "Jesus says WHAT about peace?" because we saw that as

Jesus talks with his disciples in Matthew 10, he says THIS about peace: I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

- And we saw how Jesus was speaking prophetically, and how the way that people respond to prophets, and respond to Jesus, did not create an atmosphere of peace and harmony and unity, but one of division and conflict, and we saw how Jesus was telling his disciples that they could expect to meet opposition and rejection and even execution as they followed him and went out to do what he had given them authority to do. But we also saw that even though Jesus' disciples might find themselves in the midst of turmoil externally, they could have peace internally.
- But today we're looking at a different gospel—the gospel of Luke, and we're looking at Chapter 14. You may remember that in our Hospitality, Health and Holiness sermon on the 12<sup>th</sup> of January, we also looked at Luke 14, where Jesus is invited to a dinner at the home of a pharisee on the sabbath, and he attends and does some teaching in parables there, and on the way to that meal he heals a man who has dropsy, on the Sabbath, and then after the dinner we find Jesus traveling again, and he speaks to the crowds who are with him.
- And so we read in verse 25: Now large crowds were travelling with him; and he turned and said to them,--let's stop right there—we'll answer the question “and then Jesus says what?” in just a bit. The question is: Jesus says what about parents?
- Let's look at what Luke is doing here. For 24 verses in Chapter 14, Jesus has been in the presence of pharisees, and invited guests to the home of a pharisee—the

elite and the powerful—and he’s been inside, or moving toward the inside, of this structure, this residence, where there are places of honor, and where only a select few are in attendance.

- But when he leaves that place, he moves to the outside, and instead of being in the midst of the select and the elite, we are told that there are “large crowds travelling with him.”
- Now some of us may not be able to remember that long ago, but way back in the olden days, people used to be able to gather in large groups, big crowds used to congregate and get all packed up close together, that was in the time before coronavirus, of course, and so here Luke tells us that there are “large crowds travelling with him.”
- Luke doesn’t give us the details about who is in these large crowds—but notice that it’s not just one large crowd, but several large crowds. Luke uses the Greek word “ochloi”—that’s plural--meaning that there is more than one crowd—this is not just ONE big mass of people, it’s several, and we might imagine that people are divided up into one crowd or another because of where they’re from, or the work that they do, or how much money they have, or the language that they use—I suspect that the way that folks divided themselves up into crowds back then was not all that different from the way we do it today.
- And Luke doesn’t just use the word “ochloi” to mean a bunch of crowds of different kinds of people, he uses the word “polloi” to describe how big they are—and the Greek word *polloi* means just that—great, or many, or numerous. The root word is “polus (pol-oos)” –like “poly”—and we think of words like

polytheistic, and polygraph, polygamy—it means many—but you may have heard the word “polloi” used in English in another phrase we borrowed from the Greek—that phrase is “*hoi polloi*”—you might hear of someone going out in public and mixing with the “*hoi polloi*”—and there “*hoi polloi*” means common folks, the masses, everyday people of all sorts—“*hoi polloi*”—literally “the many”—and this is another reminder that Jesus has left the exclusive world of the elites and the select and the invited, and is here among large crowds of all sorts of people.

- And we’ll see that Jesus uses different words and different illustrations to speak to these different groups in just a bit.
- So, we are told that these large crowds were “travelling with” Jesus.
- Now I’m not going to burden you with more specific Greek terminology here at this point, but I do want to mention here that the Greek that is translated “travelling with”—which is what these crowds were doing, travelling with Jesus—is completely different from the language that Jesus uses in verse 27 when he talks about “following” him. And the same is true in English—if I ask you to travel with me to Glasgow tomorrow, to accompany me, to tag along, that just implies that we are going to be together on our journey—that you are going to be in the same place and moving along with me—and that’s a different thing from my asking you to FOLLOW me to Glasgow tomorrow—if I ask you to follow me, I am saying that I am going to be going AHEAD of you, and that you will be behind me, and you’ll be watching to make sure you take the same path as I do,

and we wind up at the same destination, and we may or may not wind up there at the same time.

- And what Jesus is about to do, what Jesus is about to say to these crowds, is that there is a difference between FOLLOWING, and just travelling with, just tagging along, just showing up for the show.
- It's understandable that these crowds would want to travel with Jesus, would want to be able to see and hear what he's up to, because it's been quite a spectacle. At this point in Luke's gospel Jesus has been teaching in the synagogues and saying things like "God has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour," and he's been speaking in parables, and he's not only been saying amazing things but he's been working miracles—healing the sick with all sorts of diseases and casting out unclean spirits and producing an amazing catch of fish, cleansing lepers and causing the lame to walk, and even forgiving sins—he's even brought the dead back to life and fed THOUSANDS of people with five loaves and two fish—and there are rumours that he might be the Messiah—the one who will restore Israel to her rightful place of power among the nations.
- So it's hardly surprising when Luke tells us in Chapter 11 that after all this, the crowds who showed up wherever Jesus went were increasing. And so Luke tells us that large crowds were travelling with Jesus.
- And since Jesus is a preacher, you might think that he would see this for the opportunity that it is—you know, when you've got a big crowd, and they're

interested in what you have to say, you don't want to let that chance slip away without taking advantage of it, and so you might think that Jesus would turn to them and let them know who they ought to vote for in the next election, or maybe ask them for money, maybe pass around the offering plate, or at least remind them that next time they need to remember to bring a friend with them, so those crowds can get bigger.

- But Jesus doesn't do any of that. In fact what Jesus does is quite different from any of that. Jesus is not looking to manipulate this crowd, Jesus is not looking to get some financial support, nor is he looking to increase the size of those crowds just for the sake of increasing numbers. No, Jesus is about to risk losing some folks. Because Jesus is about to be clear about what is required of his disciples. Jesus is about to remind these crowds, and us, that there is a difference between "travelling with," and "following."
- And so Jesus says "whoever comes to me"—everybody in the crowd has already done that—they've shown up—they've come to Jesus—Jesus says whoever comes to me and doesn't hate their father and mother can't be my disciple---
- And then Jesus says WHAT?? Whoever wants to be my disciple, needs to hate their parents.
- And there was a group of teenagers standing nearby who said, "Seriously? 'cuz, like, I TOTALLY hate my parents. They're so bogus. They won't let me get my own camel—they won't let me hang out with the cool kids at the marketplace in Capernaum—they make me come home by sunset even when it's NOT the Sabbath. I hate 'em." Teenagers used to talk like that back in the first century.

- Ok, there might not have been a group of teenagers there, but it's fun to imagine that there were.
- So today's "and then Jesus said WHAT?" statement, is Luke 14:26, where Jesus says that if you don't hate your parents, you can't be my disciple.
- And this is not a translation that is unique to the NRSV, the New Revised Standard Version—in fact, if you look up Luke 14:26 in the NIV, the ESV, the ASV, and most other English translations, you'll find that the language is the same. Even the King James Version says: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."
- And "hate your parents" is just the tip of the iceberg—Jesus says you can't be his disciple unless you hate your parents, your wife and kids, your brothers and sisters—even your own life.
- Some scholars will tell you that Jesus is using hyperbole, overstatement, here—exaggeration to really drive home the point about the kind of commitment that He requires of his followers.
- But I don't think that what Jesus is saying here is "hyperbolic." I don't think he's exaggerating.
- And the reason I don't think that is, as you may remember we mentioned back in January, is that when Jesus tells the crowds "you can't be my disciple unless you hate your parents, your family, your children, your life," the word that is translated as "hate" in English is the Greek word "*miseo*," and when you translate "*miseo*" as hate, some of the nuance of "*miseo*" is lost in translation.



- The word “*miseo*” does mean to hate or detest, or to love less or esteem less— but those last two phrases really do a better job of translating *miseo* because *miseo* is a COMPARATIVE verb—it implies a choosing of one thing over another—
- When I was younger I used to play a little game with my friends at school called “would you rather”—we’d be talking on the playground or at the lunch table and someone would ask--would you rather. . . be blind or deaf? Would you rather be Superman or Batman? Would you rather be rich and really ugly or poor and really good looking? And then we’d debate about each other’s preferences.
- And that actually became a party game that you could buy with cards that ask “would you rather” this thing or that thing—and people play these kinds of games on social media, on Facebook, too—“make me choose between two things”—Coke or Pepsi, the Beatles or the Rolling Stones, Autumn or Summer, -- and people will choose one and tell you why—they might say “I prefer summer because my birthday is in June and I like hot weather,” or “I like the Autumn because it cools down and I love Halloween.”
- And that’s what “*miseo*” implies—not just that you dislike one thing, but that you prefer another thing.
- But the English word “hate” doesn’t have that kind of meaning. You can hate one thing without mentioning something else at all. For instance—in English, you can say “I hate broccoli,” or “I hate cold weather” without comparing them to anything—but to use the word “*miseo*” implies that you are comparing the thing

you hate to something else that you prefer—like saying, “I’d rather have mashed potatoes than broccoli,” or “I’d rather have hot weather than cold weather.”

- And because *miseo* is like that—it is used to compare something to something else—then in this case, all these things, mother, father, children, family, your life—these are being compared to Jesus—so while in English you can “hate” your parents, and some people do, without comparing them to anything else, what Jesus is saying here is that no one can be his disciple unless everything else comes in second place to him—nothing is esteemed more, nothing is more precious, more important—not your parents, not your children, not even your life. Jesus means more than all that stuff. You’d rather have Jesus than anything.
- And when we look back at what Jesus said to his disciples last week in Matthew chapter 10, we find that the very NEXT thing he says to them is this, beginning with verse 37:
  - Matt 10: 37 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 in verse 39 Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.
- Some versions of the Bible, like The Living Bible, and others, translate today’s verse, Luke 14:26, like this “Anyone who wants to be my follower must love me far more than he does his own father, mother, wife, children, brothers, or sisters—yes, more than his own life—otherwise he cannot be my disciple.”
  - That tones it down a bit, but what Jesus is saying here is still quite extraordinary, still quite profound, quite extreme: and it’s about to get

even more so, because the next statement Jesus makes, in verse 37, is this: Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

- Now from where we sit, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, on the other side of the crucifixion and resurrection from these crowds with Jesus, we know what Jesus is talking about. We know what the cross is, and what it means—Jesus and the cross, for us, are bound together—the cross is one of the first things we think of when we think of Jesus—and when we think of a cross, we think of Jesus—when we see someone wearing a necklace with a cross around their neck, we know that’s a Christian symbol—it is associated with Jesus
- But THESE crowds that Luke describes would have had no such understanding.
- This would likely have been a confusing statement to these crowds, even to the disciples, and indeed, we know that even the disciples didn’t understand that the cross was where Jesus was headed throughout his ministry, from the time he was born
- These crowds would not have understood how the Messiah would have anything to do with a cross, and even less how his followers would be called to “take up the cross.” But we do. We know that to be a disciple of Jesus is to follow him to his destination—we know where Jesus is going, and we know the freedom that comes through the sharing in his

sufferings, and we know that salvation is found only by the way of the cross.

- And so Jesus says “take up the cross.” But to help these crowds understand what this entails, to make clear that there is a difference between following and just travelling with, to show them that being Jesus’ disciple is not all loaves and fishes and cured diseases—not all about the benefits, but that there are requirements as well, there are terms and conditions—Ts and Cs apply—Jesus gives them some examples of what he’s talking about, what is mandatory, what is called for, in a follower, a disciple of Jesus
- You’ll remember we said that Jesus speaks to different groups with different examples—and so he begins by talking about PARENTS—because everybody has parents—everyone can understand and relate to having or being in a family, even if their family relationships aren’t good—and in the first century families were particularly important—those without the support of a family, like widows and orphans, were at risk—families took care of each other—your family was likely to be connected in your livelihood—perhaps you came from a family of fishermen or a family of builders or tentmakers—if you were poor your family helped you survive—if you were wealthy and powerful your family name was likely to be associated with that wealth and power—
- And certainly everyone has a life—so this is a very general statement in verse 26 that refers to parents and family and life—it’s for just about everybody—but

now Jesus is going to get a bit more specific and use a couple of examples that would speak more strongly to some members of the crowds than to others

- So Jesus begins by talking about Parents, and then refers to three more topics that also just happen to begin with the letter P—
- So the first topic was PARENTS, and the second is
- PLANS,
  - Jesus says “For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it?”
  - Now not everybody knows what it is to have the wherewithall to build such a structure, but some in these crowds will— they’ll know what it is to think about a building project, to consider making some efforts at movin’ on up in the world—
  - Now a tower in this sense is a structure that enables someone to keep watch for what’s coming—a tower is a place where you can look out and see what’s on its way
  - And Jesus says that if you’re going to try to elevate yourself, you need to consider what it’s gonna cost you to be lifted up—and when Jesus refers to being lifted up, he’s certainly referring to what is on its way, to the cross that lies ahead—and there is a cost involved that the folks in these crowds need to plan for—there is sacrifice in being lifted up
  - Jesus has talked about Parents, and now he’s talking about Plans

- And next, in verse 31 and 32, Jesus talks about POWER. He talks about a king. While pretty much everyone in the crowd knows what it is to have PARENTS, to have a family, to have a life, and a certain number know what it is to be able to make PLANS to finance the building of a tower, a few of them probably know what it is to be royalty—to be part of the elite, to have POWER, and so Jesus says “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? 32 If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace.”
- Here Jesus is speaking with that prophetic voice again, as he compares the coming kingdom of God to the approach of a King who possesses overwhelming force—and Jesus says that a king who saw such a conquering army coming his way ought to consider whether or not he’s going to be defeated, whether he has the POWER to stand up to such strength (which he doesn’t)—and when he realises that he does not, then, while the Other is still FAR AWAY, he ought to negotiate the terms of peace
- And we know what “asking for the terms of peace” means—it means surrender
- And surrender is what Jesus has been talking about this whole time, and surrender is what Jesus is talking about when he again addresses the entire congregation and says—here’s the last P in verse 33-- So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your POSSESSIONS.
- Give up all your possessions--That is a difficult command that we will be dealing with in a few weeks, but

- The question that the words of our Lord confront us with this morning is: Are we following Jesus or just tagging along? Just showing up for the show?
- Or are we moving in the direction of the cross? Have we sat down and considered the cost? Are we ready to negotiate the terms of peace, to consider all we have as loss?
- The scripture has a challenging message for us this morning—would you rather have Jesus? Would you rather have Jesus than your family ties, than your reputation, than your possessions, any and all of them--- would you rather have Jesus than your life itself?
- I love the way that Eugene Peterson translates verse 33 in The Message Bible—he writes that Jesus says:
- 33 “Simply put, if you’re not willing to take what is dearest to you, whether plans or people, and kiss it good-bye, you can’t be my disciple.”
- And I believe I would modify that just a bit to say “Simply put, if you’re not willing to take what is dearest to you, whether PARENTS, or PLANS, or POWER, or POSSESSIONS, and kiss them good-bye, you can’t be my disciple.”
- Would you rather have Jesus this morning?
- He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.
- Jesus calls us to be disciples. Jesus calls us to follow him to the cross. Because unless we know the sacrifice of the cross, we will never know the victory of the resurrection, we will never know the power of the Holy Spirit that takes what has been emptied out and fills it, and raises it to life everlasting.
- Would you rather have Jesus than anything?