

## Luke 14:25-35

The first thing a pastor ought to do when studying the Scripture text for his Sunday sermon is to ask himself: "Where is the Gospel in this text?" Asking this question of the text before us in Luke 14, I came to the conclusion that the Gospel is not in this text. So if I were to preach the text, I would preach a Law sermon this morning...and end it in this way: "Come back next Sunday for the Gospel; hopefully it will be in that text." But what a horrid thought! I would pray that no one here would die before next Sunday.

Is there Gospel in today's text? None that comes from the mouth of Jesus to His hearers. It's all Law. But there is Gospel nonetheless. The Gospel is He who speaks the words of our text. Christ is the Gospel - the good news of our salvation. And so even as we hear His words of Law this morning, we draw comfort from Him who speaks to us. Even as we open our ears to hear, we open our eyes in faith to gaze upon His holy wounds for us.

It is apparent from the words before us that Jesus was not running for public office. His opponent would condemn Him for His "hate" speech. "How ridiculous!" would be the criticism, "Jesus would have us hate our families and even ourselves!"

Yes, Jesus does use the word "hate." *Miseo* in the Greek. But this word does not mean to hate with an evil heart. Coming from the mouth of Christ, it means to abandon as far as spiritual resources are concerned. Our dear loved ones, and we ourselves also, cannot furnish us with the forgiveness of our sins, nor the strength we need to live the Christian life. In this sense they must be hated. We must completely turn away from ourselves, and from our family, and not make idols of men.

A Christian pastor was dying of cancer some years ago. His wife was holding his hand as he lay in his hospital bed. Suddenly he took her hand and he gently moved it away from his, and then he closed his eyes and he died. That man was my father. He loved my mother, but the time had come for him to abandon her. Their love for each other could not gain eternal life. It was Jesus' hands that carried him into heaven.

It is so easy to make gods of our loved ones. "They are my life!" we may say; "I can't live without you," we may tell a dear one. But then what does that make Jesus to us? Something less than those we truly love.

Many things in life can come between us and Jesus. The most difficult and challenging of these are relationships. Our love for another, and for ourself, can, and often does, grow stronger than our love for Christ. In death we must abandon our family, and even our own life. If we do not have that attitude now, then, says Jesus, we cannot be His disciples.

Before you ever loved father or mother, spouse, or children, you were loved by God. Your love for your family needs to flow from God's love for you; not replace it. No loved one, nor you yourself, has what it takes to give you forgiveness, life, and salvation. When we say: "You are my life! I can't live without you," it must be Jesus we are addressing. Yes, you can live without parents, spouse, or children. And in heaven you will be with them again through Christ. But you cannot live without Jesus. We can let go of the hand of our loved one, but Jesus' hand, pierced with nails for you, is the hand we never let go.

Nowhere in our text for today is Jesus telling us how to be His disciples. Many, in reading His words, may say to themselves: “Well then, I must try harder to be Jesus’ disciple. I must make more of a commitment. I must seek Him more, and my loved ones less.”

But our text is not a recipe for discipleship. All the way through Jesus says, “*You cannot be My disciple.*” He never says, “If you do this, or give up that, then yes, you can be My disciple.” He is simply saying that you and I do not have what it takes, nor will we ever. Our loved ones do not have what it takes to make us disciples. It’s not, “You can...” but “*You cannot be My disciple.*”

And yet here we are gathered together this morning on this Labor Day weekend, and I am looking out upon Jesus’ disciples. How so? It’s not because you try harder than others to be disciples. It’s not because you have the resources to be disciples and others do not. It has to do with salt. The stuff that makes our food taste better. The stuff your doctor says to avoid. “*Salt is good,*” says Jesus, “but if it loses its taste, it is good for nothing; it’s not even fit for the manure pile.”

Salt is salt because it’s salt. You don’t teach salt to be salt. You do not give it instructions on how to be salt. Sodium chloride...that’s salt. Sodium by itself is not salt, nor is chloride by itself salt. But the two together - that’s salt. Break the chemical bond and you no longer have salt. Salt is salt because the two are bound together.

You became Jesus’ disciple when He bound you to Himself in Holy Baptism. No one instructed you on how to be a disciple. The water was sprinkled and the Word of God was spoken, and you were made one of Jesus’ disciples.

That bond is a very strong bond...on Jesus’ end; but not so strong on our end. It seems to be a daily thing for us that we break our bond with Jesus and cease to be salt. We follow our own way in life; not Him. We refuse to carry our own cross as His disciples. We put our life in the way of His Word, His house, His worship, His Sacrament. We refuse to hate ourselves and our loved ones; they get in the way of following Jesus. Pretty much every single day we prove Jesus right when He says, “*You cannot be My disciple.*”

But Jesus will, nonetheless, be your Lord. He does not reject you because we fail to be disciples. He does not break His bond with you, but He forgives you. He is your Lord because He bound your sin, guilt, and punishment to Himself on the cross. He is your Lord because no matter how often we break our bond with Him, He acts in mercy toward you. He invites, He calls. He speaks, through your pastor, His word of pardon. He spreads His Table out before you. This is why you remain Jesus’ disciple - because Jesus keeps moving toward you in grace. He opens His arms to you. He shows you His holy wounds. He restores you through all He does for you. Simply put, you and I do not have the resources to be disciples of Jesus. But He does: His Word and His Sacraments...He has what it takes for you to be a disciple.

The more His words live within you; the more you receive His body and blood for you - the stronger is that bond between Him and you. He knows this, even if we do not. And so He never ceases to call you back to His Word. He never stops inviting you to His table of grace. You are His precious disciple, and He desires to always keep you as one. Amen.