

Luke 14:25-33

If you want to be a St. Louis Cardinals fan, you have to hate the Chicago Cubs. Otherwise you're not a true and loyal fan. My mom was a Cardinals fan and my dad was a Cubs fan. I'm surprised their marriage actually worked. But obviously they were more passionate about each other than about baseball.

What is your passion in life? I think for most of us it's our family. And so when Jesus says, "*If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple,*" He really hits a nerve. His words may even make us a little angry. "So Jesus, are You saying that I am to cheer and applaud for You, but boo and hiss my family members?" Of course not! There's much more here than meets the eye. Elsewhere He says, "*Love one another...By this all men will know that you are My disciples if you have love for one another.*" Jesus even tells us to love our enemies. Nowhere does He teach us that we are to hate.

I think it might be helpful in grasping Jesus' words here to look at our Old Testament reading for today. In Deuteronomy Moses tells the people of God to choose life. He is about to die, and they are about to enter the Promised Land of Canaan. To choose life is to obey all that God commands; to follow Him faithfully, and turn away from all that tempts the flesh. To choose death is relatively easy. As easy as a boulder rolling down a hill. It's what the boulder naturally wants to do. And just so, God's people, when they enter the Promised Land, will by nature want to roll down the hill away from God.

You know what a rock slide is. All the rocks and boulders on a hillside come crashing down. But a rock slide begins with just one falling rock. As it descends, it causes others to roll down with it. And soon every rock and boulder in the way will join the rock slide.

As with boulders, so with people. When someone is rolling down the hill away from the Lord, that one will take others with him. And when that person is our loved one, we have a difficult choice before us.

Consider Lot. God's command was clear: "Flee the city of Sodom before I destroy it. Leave your home there and do not look back!" But Lot's wife disobeyed. She turned away from God's command and she looked back. So what is Lot to do? Turn back with his wife, or obey God? He is put into a difficult position. To love God, Lot must hate his wife. Not boo and hiss at her and hate her in his heart. Abandon her. And he does. He chooses life. His wife turned to salt and she died. But Lot obeyed the Lord and he lived.

Are we prepared to do as Lot did? He had to abandon his wife, his home, and all that he had. But read the story carefully and see that Lot was not able to do this. God's angels had to grab him and literally pull him out of Sodom. Lot did not choose life so much as God chose life for him.

And this is how we should understand Jesus' words in our text. Not by saying to ourself: "Okay then, I'll abandon everything and everyone, and bear my own cross, so that I can be Your disciple, Jesus." Read His words carefully and see that Jesus is not telling us how to be His

disciples. He is telling us that we do not have what it takes to be His disciples. Nowhere does He say, “you can be My disciple,” but He says, three times even, “(you) *cannot be My disciple.*”

Like the man building a tower, we don’t have the resources required to finish it. Like the king going into war, we are not stronger than our enemies: sin, death, and the devil. Like Lot, unless God pulls us into His kingdom of grace, we simply will not enter it. You and I are not such a sure and steady rock that we will never roll down the hill away from the Lord.

You and I are not that rock...but Jesus is. And He is that rock for you. He did not roll down the hill. He carried His cross up the hill, and He hung there on that cross for each and every one of you. He did this, not to show us how to be His disciples, but because you and I are not able on our own to be His disciples. His words from the cross were not: “Try harder! You can be My disciples if you really try.” His words were, “*Father, forgive them.*” “Forgive them, Father, for being such lousy disciples. Forgive them for rolling down the hill away from Me so easily and so often.”

Friend, He does forgive you. You are all forgiven. God is not angry at you. Jesus died and rose again for all of you. You are loved, and you are forgiven. This is what your baptism means for you. Jesus names you as His child, His disciple, in those waters. You and I cannot be His disciples, but Jesus makes a disciple of you, for He has what it takes to do this for you.

And He has what it takes to transform your relationships with father and mother, spouse and children, brothers and sisters, and all those around you. Jesus makes you His disciple, and He loves your loved ones through you. Even your enemies He loves through you.

Jesus is, perhaps we can say, a reverse rock slide. He goes up the hill. And He brings with Him all sorts of rocks and boulders that were rolling down the hill. He leads you up the hill in love. And He can and will lead those around you up the hill toward the Lord, because Jesus is the one who has what it takes to make disciples of people like us. Amen.