

**SERMON****+ Lectionary 23 C (Pentecost 13)****September 7, 2025**

Large crowds were traveling with Jesus.  
I wonder how many of them  
turned around and went back home  
after he said this.

It sounds hard and harsh,  
but it's about counting the cost of discipleship –  
what it takes to follow Jesus,  
and Jesus is serious about that.

Think of Jesus, here, as a mentor, counselor,  
confidant or confessor.

These are people who know us better than anyone.  
They know our strengths and weaknesses.  
They know what makes us tick  
and why we do the things we do.

And the most important gift they give us is truth.  
The truth about ourselves.  
It can sound hard and harsh in the moment,  
but we know they care about us and our wellbeing,  
and we trust them.  
And so the hard, harsh truth  
is really good news, and an incredible gift  
for helping us heal and grow.

Jesus' words here are the truth about what being his disciple costs –  
the truth about what following him looks like.  
It sounds hard and harsh,  
but it's from one who loves you –  
cares about you and your wellbeing.

And for Jesus, it's a little like a light switch.

Not a fancy switch with a rheostat dimmer,  
 but a simple switch with two positions: on and off.  
 Either you're a follower of Jesus or you're not.  
 On, or off.

The Greek language treats love and hate that way, too.  
 These large crowds didn't hear  
 this whole section about hating family  
 the way we hear it.  
 Hate here isn't the intense, passionate dislike  
 when we detest or loathe or despise something.

In the Greek language, in this idiom,  
 hate just means you don't love.  
 What Jesus says here is about priorities for loving.  
 In fact, the way Matthew says it  
 explains it a bit better:

“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.” (Mt 10:37)

For Jesus, loving him and following him  
 is priority number one.  
 It's not that Jesus calls us to hate our family,  
 but that if your family doesn't join you in following him,  
 then loving and following him  
 takes priority over your family.  
 You who are here now without your family  
 made a version of that very decision earlier.

The point for Jesus is  
 that he is the top item on your priority list.  
 Loving him, following him is the first priority.

And it's been that way for you since you were baptized,  
 when God claimed you as child and heir,

children of the heavenly Father,  
 and filled you with the Holy Spirit of God's own life  
 to guide and empower you  
 to live the lifestyle of the heavenly kingdom Jesus lives.

And you were marked with the cross you carry every day  
 to remind you of the life Jesus gives you.

And you were commissioned to be a disciple of Jesus,  
 to be the hands – the doers – of God's work,  
 to follow him as your mentor, confidant, rabbi.

To follow,  
 not just to walk along like the large crowds  
 that were traveling with Jesus –  
 but to “follow” him as in “to imitate” him,  
 to do what Jesus does,  
 to live and act like your rabbi.

And that is why Jesus is so serious about this.  
 Because to follow him has very serious consequences.  
 And that truth is what he’s revealing to us here.

These large crowds are traveling with him,  
 on the way to Jerusalem,  
 where he has set his face to endure the fate of the prophets,  
 where he will take up his cross literally,  
 where he will love God and you with his whole being to death.

The life Jesus calls us to  
 is the life he himself lives for us.

So we do the things the cross on our forehead  
 and the Spirit in our being guides us to do,  
 and we calculate the cost.

To teach Sunday School means  
 we have a lesson to prepare.

To come to Sunday School means  
we make it a priority over everything else we could have done.

To contribute the goods we collect for others means  
we take the time to shop and give our own money to buy them,  
and make that a priority over everything else  
we could have done for that moment.

To worship God means  
we don't spend all morning with coffee  
and the Sunday paper puzzles,  
but we get up and ready and go to church,  
even without our family, if necessary.

It sounds like hard and harsh language from Jesus,  
but it means making very simple decisions throughout the day –  
using our hands, our feet, our voices for God's work.  
And that stands out in the world's way  
and requires sacrifices to what we would otherwise do  
if all we cared about was ourselves.

But we do it  
because we are baptized children of God,  
called to and guided by the Spirit in  
a life of the kingdom way,  
and made to be followers of Jesus,  
who always goes before us on the way,  
taking up his cross,  
and giving himself for us.