



Hate Your Father and Mother

Luke 14:25-33

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Growing up, my parents used to ask me this question of disgust, “What part of *no* don’t you understand?” Have you ever heard this question before? ... Now, truthfully, I don’t know if my parents really used to ask me this, or if the question is just an associated memory that came from teachers and other adults asking the same question. But, even not remembering exactly who asked the question, I can remember all the sassy ways I thought to answer the question. ... “You said ‘no?’ I thought you said ‘Ohhhh.’” ... “You said *no*? I thought you said *no problem*.”

It’s funny how we have selective hearing – or perhaps selective interpretation – when listening to those with authority. The popular phrase that Jen and I offer as parents today is, “Am I saying these things out loud? Because it doesn’t seem like anyone is hearing me.”

The art of selective hearing is not a practice only utilized by children. As a people of faith of all ages, we have mastered the art of selective hearing – or maybe, selective reading. When it comes to our faith, we all have a few favorite verses that drown out much of the other scriptures in the Biblical text. But truly, there is no singular verse that gives us the full witness of God’s will. As good Wesleyans in the Methodist Church, we believe that it is the *whole* of the scriptural witness that proclaims the truth of God’s will and work in the world.

Even as we are culturally and societally in a very different place today that in the days the Biblical word was penned, every text still offers us a glimpse at the saving work of God in the world. There is good news to be found in every story of the Biblical witness that proclaims God’s love for the creation that was made by God’s hand.

As we take up the invitation to study God’s word seriously, we’re spending *this* season looking at some of the more complicated words of Jesus, utilizing the scholarship of Amy-Jill Levine in her book, *The Difficult Words of Jesus*. I invite you to pick up a copy of the book and to read along, and I invite you to join in our small group discussion, which will be meeting a few times during this worship series. Our first group discussion will take place today after worship. You can join either in-person, or online through zoom.

This morning’s text comes from the 14th Chapter of Luke. As we get into the story, let’s set the scene: prior to this text, Jesus had been at a private dining function in the house of a Pharisee. The fact that Jesus is at such a private function indicates that the impact of Jesus’s teaching has reached beyond the 12 disciples. Enough people have taken an interest in what he has to say, that even a Pharisee – a teacher of Judaism – has invited Jesus to a private party.

As we get to verse 25, the start of our text today, we find out just how popular Jesus has become; it reads, “Now *large crowds* were travelling with him.” He’s left the private setting of the dinner party and is back out walking on his journey to Jerusalem. ... The text here doesn’t say he’s going to Jerusalem, but in Luke’s gospel, after the Transfiguration in Chapter 9, Jesus is on a continual path toward Jerusalem. He is making his way to the city where he will be forced to carry a cross to his own crucifixion. And, at least at this time, there were large crowds travelling with him.

As this multitude of people are with him, Jesus turns and addresses them all.

I want you to put yourself in their shoes (or perhaps, sandals) for a moment. The teacher is going to speak. You’re hushing those around you so that you can hear, for this miracle working rabbi is about to say something, and you don’t want to miss a word.

The crowd quiets, and Jesus speaks: “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.”

I can imagine that, even as Jesus is continuing to speak, the people in the crowd started to turn to each other, whispering, “What did he just say? ... Can you hear him? I’m not sure I’m hearing what he’s saying correctly.” ...

Jesus continues, “Whoever does not carry the cross cannot be my disciple. ...”

Again, the crowd would have turned to each other, whispering, “Did he just say we have to carry a cross? What’s he talking about? What kind of cult is this, that following the leader ends in death?”

I imagine it continued like this as Jesus kept speaking until he finished the address, “None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.” Verse 35, then concludes, “Let those who have ears to hear, listen!”

Up to this point, beginning in chapter 5, almost every chapter of Luke’s gospel indicates that Jesus was followed by these large crowds. He’s regularly followed by these throngs of people who wanted to witness his miracles and hear his teachings. ... But get this, this is the last time we’re told that Jesus is followed by large crowds. We’re told there were crowds with him again in Chapter 18, 4 chapters later! But even with dwindled crowds, the coming pause is the longest textual gap in the Gospel of Luke between stories of crowds following Jesus. And even then, Jesus doesn’t ever address a crowd again like he does here in Luke 14, we’re just told that Jesus was travelling with a crowd as he came near to Jerusalem in the later texts.

Perhaps the lack of any future public teaching or large crowds following him is a statement about how Jesus’ ministry transitioned as he drew closer to Jerusalem, but I find it a bit humorous that this is the last public teaching Jesus offers to the crowds that followed him. Perhaps the crowds following Jesus found the text as disruptive and disappointing as we do today. ... In order to follow Jesus, to be a true disciple, we have to hate our father and mother, our brothers and sisters. We have to hate our own

life. How is this possible? How does this jive with the rest of the Biblical witness? What do you mean Jesus?

What did Jesus mean? ... Let's consider the possibilities.

The first possibility that comes to mind is what Jesus says here is lost in translation. Is it possible that Jesus didn't really say we should "*hate* our father and mother?" Indeed, in Matthew's gospel, this story is recounted with Jesus saying, "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me." So, as Matthew recalled, Jesus wasn't inviting a hatred of parents, he was indicating there should be a hierarchy of love. Perhaps this makes the invitation more palatable, but it doesn't make it any easier to follow. At best, the invitation is to set up a flow chart that sets up Jesus as more worthy, deserving, and loveable than our own parents; and at worst, the invitation is to reject loving our parents all together.

Another possibility is to ignore this text; to act as if it didn't exist. In this text, Jesus says "hate your father and mother, brother and sister, wife and children." If we can look beyond the patriarchy steeped in this text, noticing that Luke's audience is clearly men who may have a wife to hate (there is no instruction to hate a husband here), we can note that this text goes against other words of instruction offered in the Biblical text. As we were reminded of last week, the 10 Commandments say we have to honor our mother and father ... can we honor them and hate them at the same time? It's also hard to understand Jesus's instructions to hate one's wife when reading Paul's letters to the early church. In Ephesians, Paul explicitly states that husbands are to "love their wives." How can we both hate and love our wives? Are there times when it's appropriate to do both?

Can we simply ignore Jesus' words here because other texts say something different?

Amy-Jill Levine offers that, "to follow Jesus should not be a continuing effort of making the teachings less demanding. Jesus never said being a disciple would be easy; to the contrary."ⁱ In his next breath, Jesus will indicate that being a disciple will require picking up one's cross – it is not a simple invitation. "To understand Jesus' statement," Levine then offers, "we need to understand how the term *hate* functions."

The first thing Levine notes is that the Greek word used here for *hate* is the word *miseō* (mih-say-oh). This word is used six other times in the Gospel of Luke. "In all the uses except for our perplexing verse [in Luke 14], "hate" is something directed to Jesus, his followers, or others in the covenant community."ⁱⁱ This is the *only* time the word is used by Jesus as a preferred or necessary trait of the disciples.

A couple of examples: in Luke 1, the word *miseō* is found in Zechariah's prophecy, talking about those who hate Israel. In Luke 6, in the midst of the beatitudes, Jesus says both, "blessed are you when people hate you," and shortly after the beatitudes, Jesus says, "Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you." In Luke 16, Jesus says, "you cannot serve two masters, for you will love the one and hate the other."

No other text in the Gospel of Luke that uses the word *miseō* gives us such pause for consideration. In every other use, “hate is something “they” do to “us.””ⁱⁱⁱ In every other use, the word makes sense, even in our modern vernacular. So what are we to do with the word here in Luke 14?

To offer further clarity, Levine talks about the ways in which *hate* is seen in the world. She offers, “hate has manifestations, from the nasty tweet to the sabotage of one’s work, from the swastika inked on the office door to the signs saying, “Jews will not replace us” ... hate can be taught, and it can be carried down the generations ... hate can be perceived in how we act.” But this kind of hate, the hatred that is visible in one’s words and actions, the kind of hatred that is associated with the many -isms that plague our society, this kind of hate doesn’t make sense as a requirement for discipleship. Jesus would never wish such hurtful acts upon others, much less our family; quite the opposite, Jesus seems to teach against any such manifestations of hatred.

Nowhere, in the whole of the Gospel, does Jesus offer that hatred toward another is acceptable. There are a few places where he offers indifference, (we’ll look at some of those in the weeks ahead,) but nowhere hatred. His teachings, his parables, his witness, they teach us how to honor and love one another.

So how then are we to understand the instruction to hate in this text?

We should never forget that Jesus is an excellent orator and a prophetic preacher. Jesus knows the people around him, and he uses words and stories to connect the will of God with their real-life and tangible situations. Jesus uses parables about farmers and sheep, because the people around him are agricultural. They get, in a personal way, the connection of such stories when Jesus uses them to speak about the Kingdom of God.

The people of Israel, they’ve experienced the kind of hatred that the word *miseō* references. They’ve been the victims of hatred, from their time in Egypt, to their captivity in Babylon, to the current and ongoing Roman occupation. They would understand what it means to be hated. Jesus is intentional about his use of the word, for “Only by using the language of hate, with all its viscerally negative implications, can he show how demanding the call to the kingdom of God is.”^{iv}

As Rev. David Lose states, Jesus is making clear that “their allegiance to him will cause divisions between families, require them to give up what they hold dear, and demand more from them than they can possibly imagine.”^v Just think of what Jesus has already asked of his disciples: James and John were invited to leave their father’s fishing business. Jesus literally pulled them off the boat to follow him. How do you think their father felt about their decision to leave behind the family business? Levine proposes, “Did he think, “My sons *hate* me?””

Some followers of Christ took on new names after becoming disciples: Simon became Peter, and the apostle went from Saul to Paul. Names were vitally important for family lineage. Few things could have been so enraging to a family as dismissing the name given by a mother or a father, effectively aligning yourself with a new family.

In the invitation to hate one's mother and father, brother and sister, spouse and child, Christ is not insisting we show active hostility toward our loved ones, but, rather, Christ "is promoting the steadfast refusal to allow something less valuable to displace something more valuable."^{vi} And yes, in this we should understand, Christ is saying that our adherence to his teachings – our following the will of God made known in Christ's incarnate presence – is our primary purpose and focus – God's will is of utmost value and importance.

For Christ, following God's will is the *only* way. It is the way to promote peace. It is the way to ensure communal well-being. It is the way that advocates justice. It is the way that embraces reconciliation. It is the way that offers new life, correcting the systemic and personal failures of our past, which have caused great harm, great poverty, and even death itself. If we do not see justice, peace, love, and new life, it is because we are not following God's way, for these are God's way, as witnessed in Christ.

And here, in the midst of this challenging word of instruction, we find the promise of good news. It does not take a scholarly historian to point out that from generation to generation, our blind allegiance to family, sect, nation, race, political party, and wealth class has caused the greatest pain among creation. From the crusades, to the holocaust, to the many current domestic terrorist clans, it is our allegiance to family and sect that has so often gotten in the way of God's expansive and invitational love.

But in Christ, in giving ourselves fully to the will of God as witnessed in Christ, there is new life for everyone. In turning from family allegiance to follow Christ, the world can find peace and love, for Christ is the embodiment of peace and love. By giving up our possessions, those things that draw our loyalty before Christ, we can find communal well-being and justice for all of God's created, because Christ himself is a living testimony to communal well-being and divine justice for all of God's created. By hating our kin, by turning from family allegiance to Christ, by submitting ourselves wholly and fully to the Son of God, we detach ourselves from any animosity, prejudice, or corrupt belief that has followed our family lineage, and we ourselves find a new way, a new path, a new life centered around, and poised to proclaim, the love of God for all of God's created humanity.

The invitation to follow Christ is not an easy invitation. As I pointed out earlier, this is the last time Luke will tell us a *large* crowd followed Jesus. But the promise of life, the insistence on peace, the proclamation of love found in following Christ is greater than any personal or familial claim will ever offer. And, oh, what a joy, when the world may weep no more because God's will has been made known on earth as it is in heaven. So may it be. Amen.

ⁱ Amy-Jill Levine. *The Difficult Words of Jesus*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2021.

ⁱⁱ Levine.

ⁱⁱⁱ Levine.

^{iv} Levine.

^v David Lose. "Luke 14:25-35." davidlose.net. Retrieved September 14, 2022.

^{vi} Carolyn Sharp. "Commentary on Luke 14:25-33." workingpreacher.org. Retrieved September 14, 2022.