

Can Jesus possibly mean "hate" your father and mother?
The Rev. Dr. Martha Tucker
September 8, 2019

Blessed be God who animates our lives and invites us to follow no matter the cost no matter the burden for the reward is grace? AMEN

I cannot let this moment go by without expressing deep gratitude to all who made the Car Show the success which it was, on many levels. I commented to Kelly that this is what church is supposed to feel like: prayer, beauty, music, fellowship, and of course a feeding! Certainly we measure its success by numbers like attendance and profit on one level, but what impresses me is the joy and the community building. Thank you!

And this different mode of measurement is very much at the heart of our Gospel this morning, how do we measure cost? the cost of discipleship? Jesus tells us again and again it is by love and joy and community! So let me begin...

On this beautiful Sunday after Labor Day when we give thanks for the gift of our lives, our community, and pray for the school year and program year as it commences, we are faced with one of the most radically challenging readings in all the Gospels.

It is a reading from Luke which makes all others pale by comparison, it is a reading which might cause this preacher to bail out in favor of Jeremiah!!! or the psalm or an academic explanation of the glorious letter to Philemon....but no, today I hope we will face the admonitions of discipleship together head on, because I believe that in the end it is always and only about discipleship, it is only and always about the consequences of following Christ and the HOW of it all which Luke has been assisting us with.

Discipleship certainly is about discipline. It is about a process of as C.S. Lewis says becoming little Christs. Theologically it is about the process of sanctification and evangelism which results when we follow our Savior, when we say yes to the call!

But today Luke tells those of us who want to follow Jesus, to become his disciples, that we must **hate** our family, carry our cross (which is very burdensome) and give up ALL possessions. Direct advice. I have very little

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trouble explaining the cross and possessions part...but i am stuck on the word hate!

Imagine for a moment that you have applied to Jesus Inc. for a position as disciple. It has been advertised as a job which leads to eternal life and joy! You are called in for an interview! and it is with the person in charge, God Godself!

You are asked a few questions about yourself and your beliefs and you say wonderful things about your commitment to your baptismal covenant, your faith etc.

Then you ask God: So what exactly will I be doing?

Well you will be carrying a very large and heavy cross for many many miles and many many years and you will be tortured, even lose your life. But you will be rewarded with a mansion in the Kingdom! You will be rewarded with a new life!

Sounds interesting you say. I am in very good shape and I think I could do this. When may I start?

As soon as you tell your family good bye I hate you and leave with no possessions never to return to them.

Deal breakers! You advertised this position as being one of loving you and everyone. I have been misled!

What do you think?

I am not sure I would have made it this far in the interview!

Assuming we made it this far in our conversation with Jesus, I think we might say we are confused. Please explain how hate of family has anything to do with mission and is not inconsistent with everything else you have taught? How is it possible given the two great commandments?

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I have spent a lot of time myself trying to figure this out. Perhaps I hoped the word in other translations is not really hate?

It is!

So I was stuck with it. The dictionary was little help, with synonyms like: dislike, abhor,

The word hate is exactly what all accepted translations use. The word hate was used only once in the NT and this is it! And that is the thing I had to come to terms with: perhaps the word was chosen for a reason and very important reason. And that reason cannot be inconsistent with the entire context of the Good News, the message...

the context which is Christ’s ethic of love cannot get overturned or overlooked or subverted. God is love. We are commanded to love. So interpreting hate must be consistent with love. mustn’t it?

I propose that at least three things are possible to understand this strong word:

First, it has been said that hate was a Semitic hyperbole, an exaggeration to make the point about how conflicts ought to be resolved. if there is a conflict between following Christ, someone or something blocking the exercise of one’s call to follow, then it must be hated, rejected, discarded. (BTW this logic would also help to explain possessions which as the word suggests have a hold on us which keeps us from fully exercising our discipleship) . But the point is I think about attachments to family which may be a metaphor for earthly relationships which hinder us from realizing our holy relationship with God.

Secondly, and related, is the Christian notion which is most clearly demonstrated by the two fisherman who dropped everything and left their families, their nets, their livelihoods to follow Jesus! Their families were essentially hated. Or it feels that way whenever we place Jesus first and we are supposed to be that loyal always.

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But the third point, and this is my own guess, is that hate might be viewed in the same way we view many of Jesus' other radical demands: you must lose your life to find it...and the first shall be last...those completely radical counterintuitive koans which Jesus throws out at us!

perhaps you must hate, i.e. give up the way you think love should be, give up attachments to earthly things and people, in order to know divine eternal love.

I think now about the developmental psychology piece of all this and I remember the year before our oldest went off to college. I learned that in order to be free of the attachment to us, in fact secure attachment encourages exploration and journeying, he had to go through a kind of rejection. He had to loosen the strings in order to fly!

So this is where I choose to land with all this hate and giving up language which seems so harsh at first. That Jesus is talking about false selves, unhealthy attachments, and material goods which have a stifling hold on us and prevent us from realizing our true selves in Christ, in the Body of Christ.

Hate is imperfect love. Discipleship and the journey with Jesus leads us to perfect love.

The foregoing explanation is still fraught with anxiety. And is so very hard to do not to mention to be...As Dietrich Bonhoeffer points out grace is free but not cheap; the cost of discipleship is dear.

I picked up a book recently entitled becoming human and looked at the chapter headings:

become simple

purify your heart

drop your pride and shame

forgive

love everyone

help the poor feed the hungry

pray without ceasing

be yourself

die to yourself

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That is 10 of 37 chapter headings in one book

Overwhelming! perhaps inconsistent?

But Jesus does not expect us to get all this in an instant; it is about a lifetime.

AND we know we never take this journey alone. We know it is a process not a moment. and we know God only asks that we try, that we stretch, and if we do in the name of the Divine then we are always forgiven.

as CS Lewis reminds us: Now the whole offer which Christianity makes is this: that we can, if we let God have His way, come to share in the life of Christ. If we do, we shall then be sharing a life which was begotten, not made, which always existed and always will exist. Christ is the Son of God. If we share in this kind of life we also shall be sons of God. We shall love the Father as He does and the Holy Ghost will arise in us. He came to this world and became a man in order to spread to other men the kind of life He has — by what I call "good infection." Every Christian is to become a little Christ. The whole purpose of becoming a Christian is simply nothing else."

On days like this I invite us to take a deep breath and slowly let it out and as we do to remember we are loved infinitely. And to take solace in the mystery complexity and challenge of it all, though costly. I have recited this poem before and will do so many times again for nothing speaks more clearly to me of the clarity and complexity of God's call to us. The cost of discipleship and the free gift of grace.

FINAL NOTATIONS. ADRIENNE RICH

it will not be simple, it will not be long
it will take little time, it will take all your thought

it will take all your heart, it will take all your breath
it will be short, it will not be simple
it will touch through your ribs, it will take all your heart

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it will not be long, it will occupy your thought
as a city is occupied, as a bed is occupied
it will take all your flesh, it will not be simple
You are coming into us who cannot withstand you
you are coming into us who never wanted to withstand you
you are taking parts of us into places never planned
you are going far away with pieces of our lives
it will be short, it will take all your breath
it will not be simple, it will become your will

May following Jesus become your will. May you know the joy just on the other side of the cross toward which we all must journey if we are to know eternal life! AMEN