

16 Pentecost Proper 18

8 Sept 2013

Well, we seem to have some pretty difficult statements in our readings for today - God making evil, Jesus telling us to not only hate those people close to us, but to give away all our possessions.

If this were the beginning of stewardship season, then I would tell you that a 10% tithe really isn't asking much when we see that Jesus himself said to give it all away.

But, I'll save that little gem for my official stewardship sermon.

As for our readings today, everyone I know, can't help but notice this passage in which Jesus actually tells us to hate. Jesus - of all people - telling us that we need to hate, that we **must** hate the people who are closest to us.

Now, it's not the job of a preacher to simply explain away the difficulties in the Bible. Of course, the natural reaction, however, is to try to explain away the meaning of that terrible word "hate".

But, you see, I've already tried to do that. I've looked up the Greek word and found its meanings. Unfortunately, it seems to be just what it seems to be - hate.

Now, there is a possibility that it might mean "hate" in terms of just diligently staying away from something, such as we find when we're told to "hate evil" - stay away from it - don't go near it. It **is** possible that there could be some sort of neutral attitude involved in the meaning.

But how can there possibly be a neutral attitude towards those people who we most easily love and cherish?

There's no way there can be any sort of neutral or dispassionate attitude towards those closest to you. You cannot stay away from your parents,

children, spouse or brothers and sisters without creating pain and hurt.

And so, it's definitely not the job of a preacher to simply explain away difficulties we find in the Bible.

But, it most certainly **is** the job of a preacher to make sure we properly understand just what the difficulty is.

But first I'd like to point out just a couple more difficulties we ought to be aware of with this passage.

You see, it seems that only in the Gospel of Luke do we read anything like Jesus saying we have to hate our parents, children, spouses and siblings. Now, this ought to be surprising because Luke is known as the doctor, the physician, the healer. He's known by those terms because in Luke's Gospel, more than any other Gospel, Jesus is presented as a healer, a helper, the bringer of revelation which spread all throughout the Roman Empire.

And so, as difficult as it is for us to read this passage, it's really odd that an evangelist such as Luke would actually use it.

But now I'd like to turn toward properly understanding the difficulty we're presented with. I can't pretend that what I say is Gospel. I can't pretend that I'm completely correct in what I have to say, but I have done a good deal of praying and reading and what I have to say does seem right to me.

You see, one of the first things we have to recognize is that Jesus is speaking to two different groups. Particularly since this is the acts of Jesus as reported by Luke, we have to understand that not only is Luke telling us what Jesus did and said, but Luke is also telling us things he thinks are important for our journey of faith.

Luke is telling us what Jesus said to that large crowd that followed him just because Luke sincerely believes that something of that conversation is

crucially important for our own journey of faith.

And so, it would make sense for us to get to know that large crowd that was following Jesus - get to know that crowd just a little bit better.

Their experience of Jesus was quite a bit different from our experience. For them, all that they knew of Jesus at that time was that he was an incredibly great healer - he cast out demons, he restored deformed limbs, he cleansed people from leprosy, he allowed the paralyzed to walk, he gave sight to the blind and he fed multitudes of hungry people. But Jesus also showed them that he could put the Pharisees to shame.

That large crowd was there following Jesus just because Jesus had shown them the overly superabundant gifts that God can give to his chosen people. In other words, Jesus was a super-rich superhero who was putting on one incredible traveling party.

This large crowd following Jesus had no clue whatsoever what would soon happen in Jerusalem.

This large crowd had no clue whatsoever that Jesus would be arrested, beaten, and crucified.

Now, there is some debate as to just how much Jesus himself knew about what lay ahead. At the very least, however, he must have known that there would be trouble and he would suffer dearly for doing all the incredible things he'd been doing.

But, that large crowd had no idea. And so, Jesus had to dump a cold bucket of reality on them.

And it's also important to note that even his own disciples couldn't live up to the demands Jesus mentions here. Even his own disciples couldn't fulfill the demands of what Jesus here calls discipleship. That is, they couldn't fulfill the demands until after the Resurrection. After the Resurrection,

they were filled with such a spirit that they could face torture and death. But, by that point, there was no need for them to "hate parents, spouses, children and siblings." By that point, they were so filled with the spirit of resurrection that they could face all perils with faith, and hope, and love.

But the question remains, just what is this passage saying to us? Just why did Luke include this passage for us to read and pray over?

Well, I'd like to suggest that we focus our attention on another part of this passage. I'd like to suggest that we consider ourselves as the king that would wage war. You see, so often, the things we do fall short of God's hope for us.

That's the whole reason we do the confession of sin.

More than just some sort of self-torture or scouring of the soul, our confession of sin is so much more like the peace delegation that the weaker king sends out to the stronger king.

The confession of sin isn't just some exercise in self-examination and self-condemnation. The confession of sin is at its heart and soul a peace offering. It is a peace offering to the only one who can rightfully be our Lord and Master.

And so, my hope for you is that you do not get bogged down in the strangeness of Jesus saying to hate those people closest to us. That's not really the difficulty for us.

The real difficulty for us is deciding whether or not to send that delegation of peace to our Lord; to offer ourselves up to his service; to invite him to be our King. Amen.