

Sermon for 7 September 2025 by Rev. Lynette Poulton Kamakura
St. Luke/San Lucas Episcopal Church, Vancouver
Jeremiah 18:1-11; Psalm 139:1-5, 12-17; Philemon 1-21; Luke 14: 25-33

Almighty God, you have given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplication to you; and you have promised through your well-beloved Son that when two or three are gathered together in his Name, you will be in the midst of them: Fulfill now, O Lord, our desires and petitions as may be best for us; granting us in this world knowledge of your truth, and in the age to come life everlasting. Amen.¹

In her sermon last Sunday, Rev. Amy spoke of love, love for each other, love for our community, love for the stranger, love for ourselves, love of God. It was a beautiful, encouraging message for difficult times.

Then we come to today's gospel: Jesus said, "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." Hate. Hate your father and mother. Hate your spouse and children. Hate your brothers and sisters. Hate. Not beautiful. Not encouraging. Actually, very difficult. Uncomfortable. Challenging.

In doing my research and preparing for this sermon, I read a number of other sermons on this passage. A lot of them, very understandably, tried to dance around the gospel. Hate—it doesn't really mean hate. It just means "loves less than." Others skipped over this part altogether, focusing instead on the part about planning, preparation, being ready to do what God calls us to do.

And I can understand where these preachers are coming from. Who wants to stand up here, in front of you all, and preach about Jesus calling on us to hate our family members? That's not what preachers like to do. And I'm sure it's not what you came to church to hear, either. Maybe I should have taken the advice I received to preach on the Psalm instead!

When we as human beings are faced with something difficult, something uncomfortable, something that challenges our world view, we often try to avoid it. To talk about something else. To explain it away. To smooth off the rough edges. To make whatever it is fit with our existing ideology, our deeply held theology. To find a way around it. Or maybe just skip over it altogether.

I'm currently reading a book entitled "I've got questions: The spiritual practice of having it out with God." In the Foreword, a friend of the author writes the following: "I do not believe that God is clutching their pearls over your honest seeking of truth, nor do I think you need to renounce everything you once loved or hoped about God....If you're honestly

¹ A Prayer of St. John Chrysostom, PBC. P. 102

seeking God, you will find God...I believe with my whole heart that you've landed here at the invitation of the Spirit. So this isn't time to panic nor is it time to pretend to be fine or to rush to new certainties. No, this is the time to fully live into the season of wrestling and questioning and discerning to which the Spirit has called you...I believe your own wilderness season of faith will actually become an altar of intimacy with God and genuine transformation for you. You're in exactly the right place at the right time. You're also deeply held in the love and the welcome and the goodness of God."²

The Spirit (and the authors of the Revised Common Lectionary) have called us to struggle with this particular text today. To question, to meditate, to discern, and to believe that somewhere within these challenging words, there is a truth for us. We are here at this time, in this place, to wrestle with this text. As we do so, we are held in the love and welcome and goodness of God. And in this struggle, we will be invited into an intimacy with God and to experience a genuine transformation.

So, buckle your seatbelts. Together, with each other and with the Holy Spirit, we're about to take on one of the more challenging passages. And wrestle with the difficult question, "Did Jesus really tell us to hate our family?"

Before diving into Jesus' words themselves, let's take a look at the context, at the setting. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. As he's passing through the countryside, he continues his ministry—teaching, preaching, healing, challenging those in authority, standing up for the marginalized. And in doing so, he's attracting attention. Great crowds of people are coming out, traveling with Jesus. These are people living under an oppressive Roman rule, people with very little hope of relief from an overpowering burden of poverty, reinforced by heavy taxation and an unfair judicial system, favoring the strong over the weak, the powerful over the just.

These people, these crowds, are looking to Jesus for salvation, for deliverance, for a way out. They want Jesus to call down the power of God, to drive out the corrupt leadership and to replace it with justice and mercy and peace.

Jesus is aware of their desires. He sympathizes with them. He wants good things for these people, too. However, Jesus is also aware of something else. Change requires leadership, and leadership, truly transformational leadership, is not free.

When Jesus says that whoever comes and does not hate their family, does not carry the cross and follow me, cannot be my disciple, Jesus is not rejecting the crowd. He is not saying that these people don't have permission to be a disciple, that they are not among the chosen few. Rather, Jesus is saying that they don't have the capacity, the ability, the strength and fortitude, to be his disciple. Some translations read, "whoever does not carry

² Hicks Moon, Erin. "I've Got Questions: The Spiritual Practice of Having it Out with God." P. 12

the cross is not able to be my disciple.” What Jesus seems to be doing here is reading the warning label to an enthusiastic crowd that is focused on the outcome.

Taking these examples in reverse order, Jesus points out that a king finds out all he can about the enemy before starting a war. If the enemy has twice as many soldiers, the king would better serve his people by sending out wise negotiators to come up with a peace deal even if it costs some land or riches, than to go into a battle that guarantees loss and death.

And a landowner that wants to build a tower in order to secure his land, should figure out how much it will cost, what supplies will be needed and whether he has enough, before he begins digging a big hole in the ground and putting in foundations for a tower that will never be finished.

Note, in both these examples, what the king and what the landowner would like to do is good—protect their people, protect their land. However, in order to accomplish this, they need to understand that it will not be easy. It will cost something. And if they are not able to pay that price, they may need to take another path, to find a peace deal rather than a victory in battle.

So, with that in mind, let’s look again at that first bit, that hating people part. “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, is not able to be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me is not able to be my disciple.” Families, like watchtowers and armies, provide protection. They are the crucibles in which we are formed. And they require energy, commitment, compromise, to maintain.

What happens when our commitment to God, to following God’s path, to mercy and justice and peace, to feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, welcoming the stranger, what happens when that comes into conflict with the views, the beliefs, of our family members?

Many of us are facing these questions right now. In our current political environment, so many of us are not on the same page as our families. We may choose to avoid political discussions at family gatherings in order to maintain an uneasy peace. We may be watching our words carefully, treading lightly, trying not to set off any fireworks.

Or we may feel obliged to speak up, to confront, family members, and in doing so, we may see our families fracture, disintegrate in front of us. We may even have experienced the anger, the bitterness, and the overwhelming sense of loss that comes with the realization that some of our family members hold to beliefs that we just cannot live with.

The author and theologian Diana Butler Bass, in her recent posting about this passage, shared that she has not spoken to her brother in eight years. Their relationship fractured when they took opposing views of events in Charlottesville, when Heather Heyer, a young activist, died. She writes that “In 2024, immediately before the last presidential

election, the American Psychiatric Association found that 1 in 5 people reported broken family relationships because of politics. Twenty percent of the population—which makes for tens of millions of people, roughly 50 million, counting only the population of American adults.”³

When Jesus told this crowd of excited follows that becoming a disciple, picking up a cross and following him, would come with a cost, that not everyone was going to be able to become a leader, a disciple, Jesus was not being cruel, nor was he advocating hate and violence. Rather, he was pointing out that truly following, could result in broken family relationships, in loss of friendships and standing and prestige. That it might require sacrifice and compromise. That it was not an easy path.

Unlike in Jesus’ day, we are not under Roman occupation, even if it sometimes feels like it. Unlike the early church, we are not tortured or imprisoned or put to death for being Christians. We live in a country where Christianity is still considered an acceptable religion.

Even so, following Jesus’ teachings, welcoming immigrants, feeding the hungry, healing the sick, affirming the marginalized, picking up that cross and following in Jesus’ footsteps—does come with a price tag. The cost may be financial. It may be in time and effort. It may include a loss of social standing. It may even mean broken family ties. And these things hurt. These are true losses. Jesus did not minimize the costs to those considering becoming his disciples. He knew that they would feel grief and loss.

And as we go out into the world today, into our world of brokenness, we should also walk out clear-eyed, knowing that not all those streets are paved with gold. Some will be filled with roadblocks and ditches. As we carry the cross, we may, like Jesus, stumble and fall, multiple times. At times, we may be like those in the crowd, who were not able to carry that cross.

But we are not alone. God is with us. And God has provided a community to walk, or stumble, along with us, to lift us up when we fall. When we read the newspapers, when we look at the world around us, when we deal with all the sorrows and losses in our lives, it may not always feel like it, but we are in exactly the right place at the right time. And we are all deeply held in the love and the welcome and the goodness of God. Amen.

³ Butler Bass, Diana, “Sunday Musings, August 16, 2025”