

Jesus' Views on Family Values and Property Portfolios September 8, 2019

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Luke 14:

[25] Now great multitudes accompanied him; and he turned and said to them

[26] "If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

[27] Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple.

[28] For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?

[29] Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, [30] saying, 'This man began to build, and was not able to finish.'

[31] Or what king, going to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and take counsel whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?

[32] And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends an embassy and asks terms of peace.

[33] So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

I have a confession to make. I knew you would eventually find out. I just hope you aren't too disappointed in me. I have struggled with how to tell you this. It didn't happen all of a sudden. It gradually developed and I eventually reached the point where I couldn't help myself. You know the old hymn, "What A Friend We Have In Jesus", with its pleading refrain, "Take it to the Lord in prayer." That's what I did this week. And now I have to tell you just what it is. Are you ready? It involves two things: the first thing is **I love my family**. Yes, I said "love". Yes, I know Jesus says in today's Gospel, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."

My problem is I don't just love my family, I am wild about them! There isn't anything I wouldn't do for them. And it gets even worse, I don't just love my family, Elsie, our children, our grandchildren, my aunts and uncles and cousins, I also love genealogy and discovering information about everyone who has ever been in my family. I even work on Elsie's side-of-the-family genealogy. When we moved into our house, we moved a four-drawer fireproof filing cabinet that contains 20 years' worth of research on over 16 family lines, some

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going back to the 9th century. Our grandson Aiden's line goes back to 897 in Korea. And did you know - Dwight Eisenhower was the third cousin twice removed of the husband of my second cousin twice removed? And did you know that a painting of my 8th great grandmother hangs in the Rotunda of the U.S. Capitol? That would be Pocahontas. And did you know, through President Obama's mother's line, the former President and I are 7th cousins, once removed?

So, what do I do after making such a confession about my fanatical love of family? What does any one of us do, hearing today's Gospel, and finding ourselves in love with our families and our family history?

The first thing to do is to remember that reading the Bible in English is often like trying to kiss the bride through the veil. The English word hate means to loathe with a passion. It is a very poor translation of the Greek here, which itself is a poor translation of the Aramaic Jesus spoke. The Aramaic root word means "to turn away from, to detach oneself from," rather than our animosity-laden understanding.

In Genesis, we read in one verse that Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah (29:30), but in the next verse, it literally says that Leah was hated ("unloved" in NRSV, see also v. 33). Leah was not hated like we usually use the word, but Jacob simply loved her less than he loved Rachel.

Matthew 10:37 interprets Jesus' saying: "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."

Look at what one of my pastor colleagues observes about this: "In contrast to some testimonies I've heard, where the converts have given up the worst things in their lives: drugs, alcohol, promiscuity, etc. in order to follow Jesus; Jesus demands that we give up the very best and most important things in our lives in order to follow him."¹

Jesus expects us to love our families, but to love him far more than our families. Jesus and his call to God's desired discipline of self-giving love must come before everything else. How much do you love your family? Do they come before your love for Jesus Christ? Someone in a former parish told me to my face one week, "Since all our family plans didn't work out, we've decided to come to church!"

Professor Bill Loader, who teaches New Testament at Murdoch University in Perth, Australia, has written something about the subject I would like you to hear: "The call to discipleship is not an ancient form of doing your own thing or finding true happiness in spontaneous self fulfilment adrift of all others claims and free of care. On the contrary it is a call to be on the journey....and will lead to Jerusalem."

It cannot compete with the feel-good philosophies of modern or ancient times. It is an invitation to engagement in radically inclusive love, living from the life of the God of love, and living in solidarity with all who share that love. So, it's not just about me; it's about us and it's about them. Ultimately it is also about

¹ Exegetical Notes by Brian Stoffregen <http://www.crossmarks.com/brian/luke14x25.htm>

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family, but from a radically different perspective which turns much of what goes for family love upside down and meets family as persons with the distance and intimacy which is appropriate, undefied and de-demonized.²

You recall, Jesus was teaching one time when people came and told him his mother and his brothers were outside wanting to see him. He replied, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it."³

Now, you, like me, will have to do the calculations, as Jesus recommends. How much is my family and my regard for them and the priority they have in my life and all we do together and all the monies we spend on each other reflective of the place Jesus Christ and his call to be his disciple has in my life? The calculation Jesus recommends is not to crunch the numbers to see if we have enough money to build our houses or buy our cars or erect our satellite dishes. It is if we have enough love for him to finish the job, he calls us to complete the job of being his disciple.

The second thing I have to confess to you this morning is that like the rich young ruler I have not renounced all my possessions. I am still holding on to them. I can't begin to describe them all to you. They include a Hamilton 21 jewel railroad watch with a gold chain, a \$2,000 HP Pavilion i7 quadcore 18" laptop computer, lots and lots of books, a number of autographs of famous people, including autographed baseballs by the great stars of the 1950's and 60's like Mickey Mantle, Hank Aaron, Ted Williams and Willie Mays, a painting of my son on glass by a Russian artist valued at more than \$3,000 and ... I could go on and on. We've got so much stuff we had to buy a storage barn, do a garage conversion and build two attics in our new house to hold it all!

And of course, Jesus tells us in today's Gospel that unless we renounce all that we have, we cannot be his disciple.

As Terry Parsons, the stewardship officer of The Episcopal Church USA, reminds us, "It seems painfully clear... Citizens of the United States have more possessions than any people that we know of in the history of humanity. The intriguing thing is that along with more money in our pockets than any previous generations, we also owe more money than ever before. It translates into more than **\$137,063** in per household debt in the United States.

Average credit card debt is now \$5,331 per household. Americans are now carrying \$1.5 trillion in revolving credit card debt. This is the total of the amounts that show up every month in the "balance due" space on millions of debt statements across the United States. According to a report by Cambridge Consumer Credit, a research organization, 47% of the people who paid less than the full amount of their credit card bills in a

² <http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/LkPentecost14.htm>

³ Luke 8:21

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recent month made only the minimum payment due. In fact, only 13% of Americans with an outstanding balance could afford to pay more than half the balance. For those making only the minimum payment, depending on finance charges, it can take as long as 30 years to pay off a balance. And, the total amount of finance charges paid over that time period, could be as much as four times the amount of the original charge.

The result of increased debt is an ever-increasing number of bankruptcies, with an estimated one family in every 100 families affected in some way. The reason for the debt is our desire to acquire. The pursuit of “stuff” has become the national obsession.”

When Jesus tells us, as he does today, that we cannot be his disciple unless we renounce all we have, he is not saying that we absolutely without condition have to get rid of everything. He is saying, we have to see things only in relation to their ability to meet our basic needs and to help accomplish his holy work of love and mercy.

Martin Luther said, "There are three conversions necessary: the conversion of the heart, the mind, and the purse."

“Considering the giving patterns of the average church member, the conversion of the purse seems the most difficult.”⁴

Eleanor Boyer lived that third conversion. One November, Eleanor Boyer of Somerset County, New Jersey, won the state lottery of \$8.5 million, and immediately said that she would give the money to her church and charity. And she did. Three weeks after hitting the jackpot, she signed over \$5.9 million to her church and has been giving what is left to various charitable organizations in Somerset County, to needy individuals in her neighborhood and three nephews, her only close relatives. Living on her pension and Social Security, she still drives the same yellow 1969 Chevy Malibu, still wears the same sensible shoes, beige trench coat and mustard velour hat, and still lives in the same gray house where she was born in 1924. While you might question her participation in the lottery, you must admire how she handled her winnings. And those who think she's crazy for what she did should go back and listen again to Jesus.

When you were baptized, and later confirmed, you were not simply joining a social club. You were not merely joining another organization. To be a baptized member of Christ's body is to be crucified with him. It is to stake your life and everything you have on his call to service. It is to make a decision about your priorities in life. Christ means to be first in your life, or not at all.

There is simply no such thing as discount discipleship; Jesus demands we pay full price.

⁴ Pastor Dan Mangler ADissinging Discount Discipleship@ Sept. 9, 2001, Shepherd of The Mountain Lutheran Church, Estes Park, CO B revised figures for 2019 http://www.smlc-elca.org/Sunday_sermons/september_9_2001_sermon.html

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William Willimon, who teaches at Duke University, tells this story.

A while back I got a call from a parent, an upset, very upset parent. "I hold you personally responsible for this," he said.

"Me?" I asked.

The father was hot, upset because his graduate school bound daughter had just informed him that she was going to chuck it all and go do mission work with the Presbyterians in Haiti.

Isn't that absurd! shouted the father. "A BS degree in mechanical engineering from Duke and she's going to dig ditches in Haiti."

"Well, I doubt that she's received much training in the Engineering Department here for that kind of work, but she's probably a fast learner and will probably get the hang of ditch-digging in a few months," I said.

"Look," said the father, "This is no laughing matter. You are completely irresponsible to have encouraged her to do this. I hold you personally responsible," he said.

"Me? What have I done?"

"You, you ingratiated yourself with her, filled her head with all that religion stuff. She likes you, that's why she's doing this foolishness," he said.

"Now look, buster," I said, struggling to keep my ministerial composure. "Weren't you the one who had her baptized?"

"Why, yes," he said.

"And then, didn't you read her Bible stories, take her to Sunday school, let her go with the Presbyterian Youth Fellowship to ski in Vale?"

"Well, yes, but..."

"Don't but me," I said. "It's your fault that she believed all that stuff, that she's gone and thrown it away on Jesus, not mine. You're the one that introduced her to Jesus, not me."

"But," he said meekly, "All we ever wanted her to be was a Presbyterian."

"Sorry," I said, "You've messed up and made her a disciple."⁵

Now, as I said, you, like me, will have to do the calculations, count the cost, as Jesus recommends. How much are our possessions and all the monies we spend to obtain and maintain them reflective of the place Jesus Christ and his call to be his disciple has in our lives? The calculation Jesus recommends is not to crunch the numbers to see if we have enough money to build our houses or buy our cars or erect our satellite dishes. It is if we have enough love for him to finish the job he calls us to complete with the time we have left here on this earth daring to be his disciple.

Amen.

⁵ Ibid.

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