

So who wants to be a disciple of Jesus?

He certainly doesn't pull any punches about what it takes.

First, "Hate your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself." Second, "Carry the cross and follow him." Lastly, "Give up all your possessions."

It's that simple and it's that difficult.

Jesus' words don't just sound black and white. They are black and white.

His words are likely not the first thing that comes to mind when we consider our faithfulness or what the Christian life looks like.

We don't often talk about the demands and sacrifices required by the Christian path. These are tough words.

So what do we do with today's gospel?

I suspect the first temptation is to soften the text and to translate it to fit our lives.

That temptation, however, is just another symptom of the consumerism that infects much of our society, church, and faith.

Too often church and faith is treated like a big buffet.

We walk in, take a look around, see what catches our eye and then we take what we like,, but leave behind what we do not like.

What's too hard to take, what we disagree with, or what does not fit our personal opinions and beliefs.

That's not how the gospels describe Jesus or the life of a disciple and to the degree that we have done that I think we have deceived ourselves.

Sometimes we need to have demands and expectations placed upon us.

Parents know this.

"You need to eat this because it's good for you."

"You need to do this because it's the right thing to do."

"I expect you to study hard and do your homework, make good friends, do your chores."

They demand and expect out of love so that their child might grow and thrive.

That's what Jesus is doing in today's gospel.

His demands and expectations call us to live differently and to be like him.

And this is a choice.

It is a choice we make multiple times a day, every day of our lives.

That's the choice Jesus confronts the crowds with in today's gospel.

The crowds have been gathering around Jesus since early in his ministry.

Jesus was the new buffet for them.

He offered healing, exorcisms, teaching, hope, life, good news, bread, freedom, and a new vision.

He had what they wanted so they gathered around and pressed in on him.

It was like they couldn't get enough.

The crowds grew in numbers, increasing by the thousands.

Something changes, however, with today's gospel.

They are no longer just gathering when Jesus is around; they are now traveling with him.

But there's more to discipleship, however, than just traveling with Jesus.

Discipleship is more than grazing at the buffet of divine life.

The life of a disciple cannot be bought, but it will cost us everything we have.

Hate your family, and your own life. Carry the cross. Give up your possessions.

Those three things, the cost of discipleship, shaped Jesus' own life and ministry.

They are to shape ours as well.

Jesus leads by example and shows us how this can be done.

So how did Jesus hate his parents?

Remember the twelve-year-old Jesus at the temple?

Mary and Joseph are frantic looking for him. They think he is lost. When they find him Mary asks, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been searching for you with great anxiety.'

He said to them, 'Why were you searching for me?

Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house'?"

In that moment Jesus hates Mary and Joseph.

He set his relationship **with them** below his relationship with God the Father.

This is not the emotional, feeling based way,, we tend to think of hate.

For Jesus, hating another is about rearranging relationships and loyalties.

Jesus is not rejecting Mary and Joseph,, or their love in his life.

This is not about rejection,, its about establishing new priorities.

For the disciple,,, no one,, and no relationship can take precedence over the relationship with Jesus; not father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, or life itself.

In that sense,, Jesus hated his own life.

He carried his cross and gave priority to his Father's will and our salvation.

He set aside his will in favor of love and obedience to God.

What about Jesus' possessions?

Birds and animals have more possessions than Jesus.

"Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head," Jesus said.

Again, Jesus gives more priority to his relationship with God than with his relationship with things.

It's all a question of priorities.

In all these things, Jesus is showing us how to do what he did.

He is showing us what a disciple is.

A disciple is a learner, one who learns to live, act, speak, and think like the teacher.

The disciple learns from the teacher and mixes that into their own life.

No one, no cost, no thing is to take precedence over or interfere with,, our relationship with Jesus.

Nothing is more important because it is our relationship with Jesus that shapes and defines all our other relationships, it shows who we are, by what we say, and what we do.

Discipleship, learning to live like Jesus, is ultimately what unifies our life.

So often we live divided lives.

We have a work life, school life, family and home life, Internet life, recreational life, political and civic life, and church life.

This division allows us to give those different pieces of our life a different priority depending on *where* we are whom we are with and what we are doing.

Jesus' demands and expectations change all that.

There can be only one priority in our life and it is to form and shape who we are and what we do.

Think about some of the implications.

- It means we are to be the same person with the same values, principles, and beliefs regardless of where we are, who we are with, or what we are doing.
- It means politics is no longer governed by party loyalty but by commitment to Jesus and doing His will in the voting booth.
- It means personal opinions and preferences give way to love of neighbor and our enemies. Imagine how that would change some of the postings and comments on Facebook and other social media, and in our personal conversations.
- It means business is not a venture to gain power, or leverage,,, but a resource to care for, support, and satisfy human needs.
- It means everything we say, do, choose, and are,, comes from and shows our love of Christ.

If we choose to live for Jesus there are costs to be paid and sacrifices to be made. We shouldn't be surprised.

We know that's true for other parts of our lives.

We sacrifice years of study for an education.

We sacrifice long hours and weekends for a successful career.

We sacrifice time, money, and other opportunities to make sure our kids get to camp, activities, and sports.

We sacrifice dessert for a healthy diet and sleeping in for a time to work out.

We know how to make sacrifices and pay the cost.

We do it because these things are important to us.

They are priorities for us. There's nothing wrong with any of those things.

They are good and important aspects of our lives,, but we cannot avoid the obvious question to which this leads.

What costs are we willing to pay and what sacrifices are we willing to make to be disciples of Jesus?

I don't know what your answer is.

The answer will be different for each of us but I am sure each answer will involve rearranging our priorities.

Our learning to be like Jesus is not just another priority, one among many;

it is to be **the** #1 priority and it has consequences for our relationships, time, money, work, energy, and effort.

No part of our life is left untouched.

If we want to know what our priority is, what guides, drives, and directs our lives, we need only look at the choices we make, what we choose to say and do and the ways in which we spend our time, money, and energy.

What do those choices say about us?

Do they reflect discipleship, learning to be like Jesus?

There's a reason biblical scholars call today's gospel one of Jesus' "hard sayings."

It's because it is.

It offers challenging words and raises difficult questions.

They are, however, words and questions that offer everlasting life.

Isn't that why we showed up here today?

We want life. We want to be fully alive in Christ.

We want to be real and authentic.

We want to be like Jesus.

Don't let the text scare you away.

Christ has made it all possible.

Let's not lose the    of His words.

Let's not leave here the same person we were when we came in.

What is one thing, just one thing, large or small, that you could do or give up that changes your priorities, that re-organizes your relationships, that gives precedence to Christ?

Choose that one thing and you will leave here today a different person.