

“On Carrying the Cross”

Luke 14:15-23; Proper 18 C, September 4, 2016

Did you hear that as of August 21, 2016—that it is on the air again? I am speaking about—a popular television program that was broadcast late on Sunday afternoons—for six seasons on the A&E Network from 2009 to 2013. The title of the original series was only one word: “HOARDERS.” The title of this new “follow-up” series is four words: “HOARDERS: THEN AND NOW.” WHY THE NAME CHANGE?

It’s because on each new episode—the therapist or organizer—who helped the family of a hoarder actually confront their problem of hoarding head on—and the negative effect it was having on everyone—is going to visit them again—to see if the changes that came about in those hoarders’ lives was actually permanent—or only temporary at best!

Whether we are actually hoarders or not—it’s probably still safe to say—that we all have a tendency to collect too much stuff!

Sometimes, those new infomercials on TV are not helpful to us either. Of course, you never planned to buy more stuff—but when you see those smiling TV salespeople---cooking a gigantic meal for lots of people in their NEW PRESSURE COOKER in an extremely short amount of time---YOU TOO DECIDED---that you JUST HAVE TO HAVE ONE. Or when you see that new non-sticker copper skillet grilling salmon on the stovetop or baking a chicken pot pie in the oven, you just have to have one! Maybe, for you, it’s when you see that new JUICER grinding up the bark of an oak tree—to make it drinkable—that you just have to have one!

(1) Brothers and sisters—one thing that gives me great joy—is REMEMBERING THAT OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST NEVER CAME INTO THIS WORLD TO SELL US ANY MORE STUFF!

He came into OUR world with only ONE expressed purpose IN MIND—to be for us our Savior, the Promised Messiah—who literally would save our souls—save our souls from the futile endeavor of OTHERWISE believing—that somehow our lives CAN become more meaningful—if we only we could acquire some more stuff!

JESUS certainly did not enter in this world to sell us more stuff—but to become our Savior from sin, death and the grave. He came to intervene between us and that old evil foe, so that THE DEVIL could no longer have dominion or the great sway OVER US he used to have!

(2) Nor did Jesus Christ enter our world—to seek any public office—by becoming a politician. He could have been elected—because one day he certainly disproved for thousands of people—that old adage that: “There is no such thing as a free lunch!” On that particular day he gave a free lunch to thousands of people; over 5 thousand of them at one time!

Why—THIS WAS REGARDED BY THE EARLY CHURCH AS SUCH A GREAT MIRACLE that it’s the only of Jesus’ miracles, that is recorded for us in all four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, IN ADDITION TO THAT GREATEST OF HIS MIRACLES, OF HIS RISING FROM THE DEAD AGAIN THAT FIRST EASTER MORNING!

Jesus had been teaching the Word of God and healing people all day. The sun was setting and thousands of people who had come out to hear him, SOME OF WHOM BECAME THE

BENEFACTORS OF HIS HEALING, were hungry. That's when Jesus told his TWELVE disciples: "Give them something to eat!"

Was Jesus being serious? Philip, the realist must have thought so—for he turns to Jesus and says: "Why not even two hundred denari would buy enough bread for each one of them to have EVEN a taste of that bread!"

But that's when Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, who was called to be Jesus' first disciple—but was always much more of one of "behind the scenes" kind of disciples than PETER COULD EVER BE --- WENT SCROUNGING about and came across that young boy with two fish and five barley loaves of bread! Jesus took the bread and broke it, the fish and blessed it—giving thanks to the Heavenly Father for them—and then told the disciples to feed the crowd. The bread and the fish kept multiplying so that even after every one of those persons there had their fill—twelve baskets of left overs were collected!

No! Jesus did not come among us to be a politician but St. John tells us in John 6:15 that these very same people came back to Jesus and wanted to take him and make him their king by force, but Jesus just wouldn't have it! That's when he slipped through the crowd and went higher into the mountains!

Brothers and sisters, when I read the New Testament Gospels, I rejoice to see that our Lord and Savior Jesus of Nazareth was never a **seller of stuff**. I rejoice to see that our Lord and Savior Jesus of Nazareth was **never a politician seeking to win a public office**.

But doesn't there still seem to be a few times when Jesus, perhaps, could have toned down his message a bit? When Jesus could have dialed back the rhetoric in his sermons—at least a few notches?

BROTHERS AND SISTERS, WHEN IT COMES TO WHERE WE FIND JESUS IN THE WORDS OF OUR GOSPEL LESSON TODAY---THINGS---FOR JESUS----SEEMED TO BE ABOUT AS GOOD FOR HIM AS THEY EVER WOULD GO!

Luke tells us: "Large crowds of people were following him," not unlike those thousands of people who were following him when he fed the 5000 men, in addition to many women and children—with those five barley loaves and two fishes.

Jesus did not come among us to sell us stuff or to be a politician! He came among us to be our Savior from sin, death and Satan! He came among us to be the **Carrier of a cross** that was not rightfully his, but ours! He came among us to be the **Carrier of that old rugged cross**, the emblem of suffering and shame, where he as the **King of Glory** would willingly die for you and me to reconcile us to his Heavenly Father!

SO JESUS—WHY DID YOU DO IT—WHY DID YOU TURN TO THOSE GROUP OF PEOPLE AND SAY: *'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. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. "'*

“What are you doing, Jesus? Just when things are starting to look up, here you are talking to people about hating their fathers and HATING mothers and HATING THEIR sisters and brothers?”

Jesus, Jesus you can't go around telling children to hate their parents. Telling kids to hate their parents is going to cost you and your POPULARITY—WHY EVEN YOUR WHOLE NEW MOVEMENT YOU HAVE GOING ON HERE AMONG THE JEWISH PEOPLE BIG TIME! Look, we don't want to tell you what to say, but it's not in anyone's best interests for you to tell any parents ever that they need to hate their kids.

Come on Jesus, we know how loving you are! We certainly remember that day when people were bringing their little children to you, and how you took them up into your arms and blessed them! When the twelve were discouraging these dear parents from doing so—you set them straight in a skinny minute! You told them: *“Let the little children come unto me and forbid them not; for to such as these belongs the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:10-13)!*

Perhaps some who were present there that day said, “Jesus, we know what you believe, but the people out there who don't really know you AND THEY won't understand this at all!

Brothers and sisters, Jesus was never REALLY encouraging anyone in his day to hate anyone else! How could that ever be possible when THE GREAT CHALLENGE HE PUTS BEFORE US IN HIS SERMON ON THE PLAIN, LUKE 6:27-36)? *“But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you! Bless those who curse you! Pray for those who abuse you!*

To the one who strikes YOU on the one cheek, offer the other CHEEK also, and from one who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either!

If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same! And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:27-36)!

Jesus was saying to people back and then and to us today—unfortunately there may come a time when we will have to choose between our love for him and our love for our children. There may come a time when we will have to choose between our love for Jesus and our love for our parents!

Not because God wants that way, or because you or I want it that way, or even because Jesus wants it that way. None of these things are to happen by our initiative!

BUT THERE VERY WELL COULD COME A TIME WHEN FAMILY MEMBERS MIGHT ABANDON US BECAUSE OF OUR LOVE AND OUR LOYALTY TO JESUS. That's not only something that actually happened in the 1st century and throughout the centuries, but may very well happen to us in this 21st century!

What it all boils down to, brothers and sisters, from Jesus' perspective, I believe is: **“Do you know what you are getting yourselves into!”**

JESUS CERTAINLY KNEW WHAT HE HAD GOTTEN HIMSELF INTO, WHEN HE TOOK UPON HIMSELF THE MISSION THAT THE FATHER IN HEAVEN HAD SET BEFORE HIM! His face was now, very much by this time, set to go to Jerusalem. Dark clouds of suffering and death loomed on the horizon. He was making his way to a cross, and he was saying to these people now: "If you can't follow me all the way, then don't follow me at all!"

There are choices, sometimes, that must be made! There are prices sometimes that must unfortunately be paid too! *"For which of you desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost? Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes with twenty thousand?"*

Following Jesus so often, if not always, does necessitate our need to take up our own crosses and follow him! This means that just as there were times when Jesus was greatly misunderstood, there may be times when you and I are misunderstood too.

You know how Jesus put on the night before he died: *"Do you remember what I told you? A slave isn't greater than his master! So since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you. And if they had listened to me, they would listen to you! The people of this world will persecute you because you belong to me, for they don't know God who sent me" (John 15:2—21)!*

Carrying the cross isn't simply about our experiencing tough times as we go through life—but it is about our WILLINGNESS TO TAKE ON SOME TYPE OF TASK THAT WILL REQUIRE A SACRIFICE OF TIME, TALENT AND TREASURE ON OUR PART—to further the cause of the Gospel and the growth of God's kingdom. Sometimes, for some people, teaching a Sunday school class to children, or taking time to sing in the choir—could be—carrying the cross. Becoming a Stephen Minister could be carrying the cross. Taking time out of your life to spend time with a Christian who has just lost a loved one death—especially if it is the death of one's husband or wife, or one's son or daughter!

There's a story that was written by someone years ago, the author of which remains for many years now, quite anonymous! It speaks of a young boy who was working in his parent's carpentry shop in 1st century Jerusalem! The dialogue has the boy muttering and complaining about having to help his father fill a Roman contract to build crosses. In another scene, the boy is seen crying. When his parents ask, "What's wrong?" the boy says, "I went to the market place and saw Jesus and He was carrying my cross! They took Him out of town and they nailed Him to my cross."

The parents comfort him saying, "Son, that wasn't your cross. Plenty of other carpenters build crosses. No, we're sure it wasn't yours." "Oh, yes, it was," the boy said. "When you weren't looking I carved my name on the cross I was helping with. When Jesus went by me, He stumbled and I saw my name was on His cross!"

To all of you who are carrying crosses of physical infirmity and fear, of spiritual doubt and discouragement, I am able to tell you the risen Savior is by your side making sure that cross doesn't crush you.

He will, by his own divine promise, someday remove that cross, and until that day, He will help you with its burden. This you can believe with all your heart, for the commitment to help carry your cross comes from the Christ who was not a seller of stuff, or a politician but the one and only Savior from sin, the One who will help carry the cross with your name and my name on it. Amen