

Proper 18C Luke 14 25 to 33 September 7 2025

A long time ago,
I was a freshman in a university back in Baltimore.

This was a place where the students and faculty
were convinced of their intellectual superiority.

So, naturally, the graffiti written on the walls
was of a very high quality.

One day, I found someone had written
“God is dead. - Nietzsche”
Then, below that quotation was written
“Nietzsche is dead – God”.

I was pretty naive,
and thought this was original and very amusing.

It was also thought provoking.
It took our conceit of thinking
that we were capable of understanding God,
and turned it inside out.

This memory popped into my head
when I started to prepare for this sermon,
and read that 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”.

Yes, Jesus really said that we should hate our parents.
Yes, this is a violation of the fourth commandment,
which says

“thou shall honor thy father and thy mother”.

The commandments are important.
God wants us to obey them.
And here Jesus is saying to hate our parents.

Moses went up Mount Sinai
to bring back the stone tablets with those commandments.

God didn't write the commandments on the wall of a university.
He didn't tell Moses to remember those words
and then tell them to the people.

God wrote the commandments on stone tablets,
stone tablets that Moses lugged down the mountain.

Twice, because he broke the first set
in a fit of anger.

And, today, Jesus tells us to hate our parents.

If we are to hate our families,
can we believe that God is love?

What about what Jesus called the greatest commandment:
to love your neighbor as yourself?

It's tempting to minimize or explain away
Jesus' telling us that we need to hate rather than love,
perhaps by thinking that Jesus was having a bad day.

Perhaps the demands of the crowds
that followed Him with their incessant requests to heal me,
feed me,
fix me
had finally become too much.

Perhaps Peter
my namesake and a kindred spirit
had finally done one too many boneheaded things.

Perhaps the thought that He was traveling to Jerusalem
to be crucified for a bunch of people
who couldn't understand
and didn't care to understand
had finally become more than He could tolerate.

But Jesus didn't stop with telling us to hate.
He also said that if we want to be a disciple,
we need to give up all of our possessions.

This is pretty harsh and pretty radical.

I can understand giving up SOME of my possessions.
That would be consistent
with the commands to feed the hungry
and clothe the naked.

But ALL of my stuff?

It seems to me
that if I gave up all my wealth to care for ten people,
soon there would be eleven people that needed to be cared for.

Surely Jesus didn't mean
that we should impoverish ourselves
if we want to be His disciple.

Or, is this another indication of His having a bad day?

But, let's take Jesus at His word,
and assume that He meant what He said.

Have you ever noticed
just how much the concept of ownership permeates our lives?

We have a father and mother.
We have a family.
We have life,
an education,
a name,
a blood type.

We have appointments, cars, incomes, expenses, homes, mortgages, ideas,
personalities, and memories.

We even have a God.

It's hard to think of something in this life
that someone doesn't have,
that someone doesn't believe is owned.

All that we have,
all that we own,
from family, to homes, to IRAs, and televisions,
and phones and on and on;
all of these are desirable to us
because they help us to create the illusion
that we are independent and self reliant.

Of course, if we own something,
we also have the power of ownership.

This gives us the right
to use “our” stuff however we want.
We are in control.

We have the power.

Having control of stuff
also means that we have the power
to deny any one else access to that stuff.

When I was a young lad,
I would wonder what presents I was going to get
for Christmas or for my birthday.

The anticipation of waiting,
the wondering,
the hoping,
and the emotional preparation
for being either elated or disappointed,
were agonizing.

In an effort to relieve that anxiety,
I would ask my parents what I was going to get.
They would usually answer
“you are going to get a silber Nichtsia”.

This was such an impressive sounding phrase.

It evoked images of a gift of exotic richness,
which, of course, would have been perfect
and no more than I deserved.

Until I learned that silber Nichtsia was German for
“silver nothing”.

This is what all of what we think we have consists of...
a silver nothing.

It is not true that whoever dies with the most toys, wins.

In today's reading,
Jesus tells us that we need to give up all of our possessions.

I suspect that He is telling us
to give up the conceit
that we OWN all of the things we claim to have.

Instead, we are to accept
that we are mere custodians
of what God has permitted us to use.

Rather than having the right
to dispose of our stuff as we wish,
we have the responsibility
to use them as God would wish.

Jesus is telling us
that a disciple surrenders ownership and self interest
in using the stuff in our custody.

To act as though we own stuff,
to presume that we have control,
and to believe that we have the wisdom
to decide who deserves our generosity,
is to assume the role of God.

A disciple does not take that role.

Jesus is reminding us
That disciples are aware that there is only one God.

And it ain't us.