

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church

Proper 18, Year C

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The Rev. Grayce O'Neill Rowe

One Gospel commentator, when writing about this particular piece of scripture from the Gospel of Luke said that one verse really must have been lost when the scribes wrote these verses. This commentator said that somehow the scribes missed the part that had Jesus, after he spoke the harsh words that we just heard in today's Gospel, after he spoke to the gathered crowds, not just to his 12 disciples but to the crowds of people who had gathered, when Jesus spoke of the need for his disciples to hate their families and to give away all of their possessions, that after he said these words, the scribe had left out the part where Jesus turned to Peter and looking around him said, "Gee, where did they all go?"

These words of Jesus sure do make me want to run away. I don't want to hate my family and I certainly don't want to give up all of my possessions. When I think about it there is not one deacon, priest, or bishop who I know and who lives outside of a monastery, there is not one who hates his or her family or who has given away all of his or her possessions in order to follow Jesus, in order to choose life. And I expect that I am not making too wild of an assumption to say that it is probably true for most of you as well, that you do not hate your family and you have not given up all of your possessions in order to follow Jesus, in order to choose life.

As Christians we believe, and we hear this over and over again, we believe that Jesus came to live among us so that we might have life, so that we might have life in great abundance. Jesus promises us that if we follow him, we will find that life. Choosing to answer Jesus' call to discipleship is choosing life.

And yet, Jesus tells us that in order to become his disciples, in order to choose life, we must hate our families and we must give up all of our possessions. So I have to beg the question, is Jesus really talking about hating our family and giving up our physical possessions, our material goods? We look back to when Jesus spoke these words and see that he had an itinerant ministry, Jesus and his followers moved from town to town.

Anyone who was weighted down with family responsibilities and with material goods certainly could not travel in the way that Jesus traveled. So perhaps Jesus was only speaking these words specifically to the people of his time.

The only trouble with this thought is that we believe that Jesus continues to speak through scripture to us today. Even though we no longer live the itinerant lifestyle that Jesus and his disciples lived, we believe that Jesus still speaks to us, scripture still speaks to us.

So what are we to do with this Gospel today? Are we to run as fast as we can? Probably not! Let me suggest a different way to look at this. I want to suggest that Jesus is talking about anything and everything that would get in the way of our relationships with him. He is not talking about hating our families unless our families prevent us from following Jesus, unless they prevent us from living a life of Gospel values, a life of generosity, a life filled with love and forgiveness. Jesus calls us to be in relationship with him and to live and love in our families with God at the center, living with Gospel values, living in relationship with Jesus.

Jesus calls us as well to give up our possessions. Are we all to live as homeless people with no possessions? How do we follow this Gospel without giving up our material possessions? I would suggest that there are some possessions that do get in our way; some possessions, not only material ones, but some possessions that do keep us from life, some possessions that Jesus knows we must give up, we must give away if we want to choose life, if we want to be his disciple.

Just like 2,000 years ago when one's physical possessions would have prevented someone from walking with Jesus, today, we continue to have some possessions of our own that interfere with our ability to walk with Jesus, some possessions that prevent us from being the best disciples that we can be, some possessions that prevent us from choosing life.

One of these possessions is fear. For some it is easy to name their fears. For others it is not so easy. But if you think that you do not live with fear, then think about how our country seems to always fear another terrorist attack or think about the fear of economic instability. In the midst of this political season and the deep divides that seem to exist in our beloved country consider the fear that we each have about the other candidate

winning the election. We are a people who are living in fear. And it is hard not to be fearful.

If we let fear determine our responses, if we let fear rule our hearts, then we are denying the light and the promise and the life that Jesus offers us. In order to be a disciple who will work with Jesus to bring in God's kingdom, Jesus tells us to give up our possession of fear. Instead of living in fear, Jesus calls us, instead, to live in God's hope, trusting in the power of God's love. That does not mean that difficult times will go away, it does not mean that the outcome for you or your loved ones may be any different. What it does mean, though, is that each day of our lives, we will be living and not dying, we will be walking in light and not darkness, we will be choosing life.

Another possession that gets in the way of our ability to choose life is control. Sometimes our controlling ways come from our fear. Other times our needs to control come from our lack of trust. Our opening collect, our opening prayer today asked God to give us the ability to trust, to trust God with all of our hearts. That kind of trust is a giving away of control, it is an opening of ourselves to the freedom that comes in following Jesus. Control is a possession that we all have. I see it in myself; I'm quite certain that Carl could tell you in great detail about my control needs. The trouble with control is that when we try to control, then we do not open ourselves up to listening to each other, we do not open ourselves up to listening to God, to trusting God. In order to become disciples of Jesus, in order to choose life, Jesus calls us to give up our needs for control.

There are more possessions; the lists will vary among us. For some it may be our anger, for others it may be our inability to forgive, our guilt. For others it may indeed be our focus on money, our focus on material goods and the way they define who we are. There are many possessions that we hold on to, possessions that prevent us from openly and totally following Jesus, possessions that prevent us from choosing life, possessions that prevent us from truly being a disciple.

Jesus calls us today to choose life. He suggests that we do this with great intention, realizing that the only way that we can be open to the life that he offers to each of us, the only way that we can be open to being his disciple, is if we are open to trusting him, if we are open to giving up our fear, our

control needs, our anger, and all of the possessions that prevent us from choosing life.

The choice is ours today; the choice is ours every day. We can live our lives filled with our possessions of fear, anger, control. We can live our lives in families that bring destruction to our very spirit. Or we can choose life by giving up these life-denying possessions. We can choose life by following the one who calls to us saying: Choose life so that you and your descendants may live.