

Proper 18, Year C  
September 5, 2010  
St. Michael and All Angels, Portland  
Ms. Kerlin Richter, Postulant for Holy Orders

Deuteronomy 30:15-20  
Psalm 1  
Philemon 1-21  
Luke 14:25-33

*I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses.  
Choose life so that you and your descendants may live  
~Amen*

Now large crowds were traveling with Jesus; and he turned and said to them, a number of fairly disturbing things.  
let's start with:

**For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it?**

I might disagree with Jesus a little bit here.  
Can we ever truly know the cost of something before we start?

It is like a woman who wants to remodel a bathroom. and so she prices out everything gets multiple bids, and budgets out the whole project. Then halfway through when her house is a disaster and plumbing is sticking out of the floor, the contractor tucks his thumbs into his belt loops, looks at the ground and says "we found some problems in the wall behind the sink."

Who can know when they begin a tentative walk with Jesus what the final cost will be and who could set out on a journey like this if they knew?

When I accepted that first piece of bread and sip of wine in the outstretched hand of Jesus, I was so lost and so broken, that I did not count the cost at all.  
I did not stop to check the balances I was carrying. I very well may run out in this crazy following. I surely do not have enough to pay my own way.

I will end this course red faced and bankrupt.  
I am sorry Jesus but do not ask me if I have what it takes because the answer is no.  
I do not have what it takes to follow you.

We are stumbling along on the path panting, behind Jesus, up to our eyes in spiritual debt, with no real plan for the final cost. And I am terrified of what this tower, of what this war will cost me.  
So the best we can do is send out a delegation of Peace.  
We will ask the one to whom we owe everything if we can come to some kind of deal.

And now you are asking even for my family, these human treasures where I am safe and know who I am, and that I am also loved here on earth, and you want me to put even that on the line?

you are asking too much.

How do I lay down my love for the people of this world and take up the cross?

This past week Jordan and I watched as two brothers we have been friends with for some time channeled all of their family anger and dysfunction and tore down something they had both worked long and hard to build. There had been tensions for a while, but then on Thursday the dam broke and all of their fears and insecurities and resentments overflowed. Neither of them is even close to being in the right, and they are both victims of patterns that neither of them started.

In Luke Jesus has been dealing with some pretty messed up families himself. A few weeks ago we had the story of the brother who wants to make sure that he gets his fair share of the inheritance. and a few weeks before that we had the story of Mary and Martha where Martha is wanting Jesus to take sides, and get her sister to do her fair share of the work.

In both of these stories, Jesus refuses to get enmeshed in family dynamics, and fails to satisfy anyone's sense of earthy justice.

Then we have the lovely passage this morning:

**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**

It is hard to work out a warm fuzzy family values type spin on this.

As a mother, texts like this can feel like they are written in Greek. Actually they are. So I was really hoping that this was a case of bad translation and my sweet Jesus would never say such a thing. Unfortunately, that's pretty much what he is saying. The softest translation I found was to discount or not to prefer, but really its not that much better.

We are all formed and shaped by our families and there is no such thing as a family done perfect. But I think what Jesus may be getting at is that we are all too often defined by our families.

I learned many lessons in my upbringing about who I am and what people like us do, and do not do.

My family of origin helped shape the boundaries of what I consider possible, and impossible; what I believe I am capable of and what I ought to do.

For our friends the brothers, those family limits are still choking them.

For the world to which Jesus was speaking your family defined nearly everything about you. To disregard your family in life was to abandon your identity.

Loving your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself isn't just about family this is your whole identity. This is what we must lay down this is what is being asked of us.

Who would you be if you didn't know who you were?

What would you be able to do, if you had no idea where you came from?

Would you be more or less likely to follow a mad-beautiful rabbi with the eyes of God all the way to Jerusalem?

What is in the way of our following Jesus?

What excuses will we use to sidestep this radical call?

What can we use to anchor ourselves in the shallow water of merely agreeing with Jesus and keep ourselves safe from being swept out to the rough sea of true discipleship?

Jesus is saying whoever is keeping their feet on the ground; whoever is keeping land in sight; whoever is saying “but Jesus, you don’t understand how it is for me and my family.”

We may long to plunge in over our heads and strike out after this God who is calling us.

but we have to let go to swim.

We have to plunge into water deeper than feels comfortable.

Paul speaks quite eloquently of family in the letter we hear this morning.

Fellow captives and a slave have become his brothers and his son. He has forged a new family in the midst of building his tower. He knows with an odd certainty what the cost is. He is in the midst of paying it as he writes to call for freedom for the slave he considers a son, and forgiveness of all his debts.

We are in God’s family now, and this family brings with it a completely new identity. In this family, we are called to become translucent so that the light of God may shine through us and illuminate the world.

Who but a fool would set out to follow this Jesus, even if we did not count the full cost before we started we should be trembling in our socks.

What will this cost us, this life of following our brother Jesus, in which nothing that appears to be ours really is.

give up the tower

give up the war

give up where you came from

give up who you are

give up being known

give up being important

give up being loved

pick up the cross and choose life