

Sermon for Pentecost 13

Text: Luke 14:25-33, Psalm 1:5-6, Philemon

"Hard To Hate"

Hate is a hard word to hear. Especially in the context of the Gospel reading where we hear Jesus say a person must hate his or her very own life, hate father and mother, or hate sister and brother. Hearing 'to hate' startles the senses, yet Jesus goes on to shake us even more.

If you don't perfectly hate like this, then Jesus says you cannot be his disciple. Added to this he says, *"...any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."* (Luke 14:33 ESV)

What does God require of you? He wants you to lay down everything and take up your cross and follow him. Anything less and you cannot be his disciple. Without this hate of self and family, without the bearing of your cross, you and I are seen as flavourless salt... and salt that's not salty is good for nothing!

A simple test of your hatred of self and family in favour of God can be best observed by your focus on your birthday over against your baptism birthday. Which of these two days gets your greater celebration?

Does the brighter spotlight fall on the day you were born, or rather, do you rejoice more over the anniversary of your day of birth into the eternal kingdom of God. Do you celebrate and commemorate the day you were born into your sinfulness or the day you were crucified and buried with Christ, the day you were baptised into his death, the day your sinfulness was defeated and you received eternal life?

Unless you hate your birthday more than the day your cross became Christ's cross, and pick it up and follow him, you cannot be Jesus' disciple!

In light of his word here, we start to see the shocking insufficiency of our existence. In fact, some of you are hard up remembering just what date it was when you were baptised, while some of you are questioning his word, trying to side step it, ignore it, or perhaps trying to justify yourself.

What is revealed here is we're not what we're meant to be! Humanity has lost its way! Our thinking has become confused and contradicted against the truth of the situation and our real position in this world and with God.

Most of us have come to accept a benign type of Christianity, devoid of anything which might seem offensive to our postmodern ears. However, what might seem to be benign is in fact malignant if you allow the word of God to dig beneath the surface and expose the reality of your human existence.

Is your quest for your idea of life the very thing that's cutting you off from the life God wants to give you?

You know, it's not meant to be this way!

In Psalm One, we're told, *"...the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish."* (Psalm 1:5-6 ESV)

So what is it for you? Are you righteous; one in God's congregation? Or, are you a perishing sinner?

There's a number of ways you might respond. First there's the way of pride. We might look at ourselves all puffed up thinking we're not doing too badly! Then, there's the way of brokenness. We might see deep within the darkness of our sin and in shame seek to flee further from God's presence.

Both of these responses are flawed! They are both equally wrong because answers are sought from within you.

However, there's another way! The third way! By this path you can be honest! And answer both questions... YES! Yes, I am righteous; I am one in God's congregation! And yes, I am a sinner! There is a part of me perishing! Thank God it's being done away with!

Why is this different from a righteous pride that comes from within, or, equally from within, a humiliation that leads to the giving up of hope? It's different because the twofold yes comes from outside. It allows you to be completely honest knowing yourself as God knows you!

In fact, God knows you better than you know yourself. He knew you before you were born. He knew you before your baptism into Christ's death on your cross! He even knew you before this world existed. As we've heard in Psalm One, the Lord knows the way of the righteous.

Now God calls you to know yourself! Know your nature; be honest with yourself and him. Know you're dying, but not despair! Rather because of the eternal joy that awaits you, endure the cross of dying, the killing of

your sinful nature, and look forward with hope; fully convinced of the future.

To see yourself clothed the way you were meant to be before sin entered the lives of humanity! To see with God given faith, when God looks at you he sees Jesus! To see you covered with the righteousness of Christ. Believing and trusting Christ's righteousness is the only way of righteousness.

When this happens we will hate what we are, but love what we have become, what we're becoming, and what we will become in Christ!

We will realise this life is more about death than life and regret and detest it's like this. But we'll also see in death what has begun in baptism will be finished and done away with, so true life can begin. We will grow in love in the knowledge Jesus is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. And we will yearn, more and more, to be the same as him.

Today we also hear about Paul, Philemon (fill-ee-mon), and Onesimus (O-ness-ee-mus). Onesimus was Philemon's slave, and after escaping and being found by Paul, Paul sends Onesimus back to Philemon. But Onesimus is different from what he once was. He's no longer a slave to sin but is now bound by the Gospel. He had become the same as Saint Paul.

Although we know little about what it's like to live in a social setting of slavery, we in fact, like Onesimus, were slaves to sinfulness but are being freed from that old bondage.

If we look into ourselves we might seek to flee our slavery like Onesimus, in despair or arrogance. But Onesimus then relied on Paul to win favour with his master, Philemon. Likewise, Christ has won the victory for us and we can rely on him to put us right with God.

We could imagine Onesimus hated his old life as a slave. We too who trust Christ to put us right will detest our old life too. We will hate the way things have become in this world. We will hate who we've become, slaves of sin. And because of it long for something much better and trust God is bringing it to fruition in our lives.

In hating ourselves we might learn to truly love who God is re-creating us to be. And then with this Christ-centred love we might love our neighbour as ourselves. We might love and serve one another as Christ loves and serves us. Amen.