

September 6 & 7 2025 Ordinary C cycle week 23 Greenwich

Does he really mean that? Does Jesus really mean,
Hate your father and mother, your brother and sister?

No. “Hate your father and mother” is a Hebraism, an exaggeration, meant to challenge us to value the Reign of God as the one absolute, taking precedence over everything else, even the most intimate of human bonds.

But just knowing that doesn’t let us off the hook.

The images which Jesus presents, of constructing a building, waging a war, and carrying the cross, starkly remind us that genuine discipleship exacts a price, and we need to be clear-eyed about it.

Deitrich Bonhoeffer, the German Lutheran pastor executed by the Nazis for plotting to kill Hitler, reminded us that genuine discipleship involves costly grace.

I dare say many of you here know something about the price of following Jesus.

Maybe you forgave someone who really hurt you.

Maybe you took time to engage in generous service for some folks in need.

Maybe you stood up to an injustice, faced down a bully, stuck to a moral decision even when powerfully tempted, kept a commitment when you wanted to walk away.

And it was costly.

So, in light of those experiences and the challenging word of this gospel, why do we do it? Why follow Jesus?

When St. Teresa of Avila complained to her closest Friend, Jesus, about the hostility and gossip that surrounded her, he told her, "Teresa, that's how I treat my friends" Teresa responded, "No wonder you have so few of them."

Why stick with him?

It seems to me that we can't hear that challenging word, about taking up the cross, unless we first hear the consoling word, "You are my friend."

We need to remember the indicative declaration before the imperative command.

The first word Jesus speaks to us is not, "Take up your cross." His first word is, "I love you. I have a great dream for you. Don't be afraid."

"I have chosen you to be my friend and companion."

The first word is that the Father has placed in us a deep hunger; it's a hunger that ultimately is stronger than our desire for food or for security or for sex.

It's a desire for union with God.

And if we discover God's dream in us, that desire in us, then we come to realize that it was the Lord who planted that dream and desire in us, the desire for friendship and union.

So, when the Lord's word, to reckon the cost, comes, we need to keep repeating that first word, to keep dwelling in that more primordial experience of being loved; sinners to be sure, but beloved ones.

"I love you. I have a great dream for you. I call you my friend." That is always the first word of the Lord to each of us.

We need to start, as we do with the prayer of St. Ignatius, the Examen, with the gratitude of one who knows himself as poor and dependent, yet blessed and beloved.

So, we keep coming back to the table, to the banquet of word and Eucharist, Spirit and Church, each other.

And I am sure of this: when we get to the end of the path, where it disappears into the gloom, and we have little light to go by, nonetheless, we can step out in trust, confident that one of two things will happen: either we will find that, even in the dark, the path is firm beneath our feet;

or we will be taught how to fly.

And the people of God said, Amen.

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Does he really mean that? Does Jesus really mean,
Love him more than your father and mother, your brother
and sister? Love him more than you love your own life?

Not exactly.

His words are an exaggeration, like if your parent said,
I told you a million times not to do that.

He wants to get our attention and challenge us to make
the Reign of God and following Jesus as the most important
thing in our lives.

Following Jesus sometimes can be hard. It can be hard
to forgive someone who really hurt you. It can be hard to
give up play time in order to help out someone who needs
you. It can be hard to stand up to a bully, or stick up for
someone who is being picked on.

Yet in all those ways you are following Jesus.

And to get the strength and courage to follow him, you
need to hear him tell you that he loves you and wants to be
your friend.

Each night before you go to sleep, just sit quietly and
close your eyes and picture Jesus sitting next to you, gazing
on you with love and care.

In the silence of your heart, tell him about your day,
what went well,
what was hard,
what you did that was kind,
what you did that took courage,

and if you messed up, tell him what you want to differently the next day.

And if you do that each night, you will eventually hear him say

“I love you. I have a great dream for you. Don’t be afraid.”

“I have chosen you to be my friend and companion.”

And that’s when you will know why you want to follow Jesus and be his friend, even when it’s hard.

“I love you. I have a great dream for you. I call you my friend.” That is always the first word of the Lord to each of us.

Keep listening, keep praying and keep following him.