

Renouncing All, Gaining All

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST [c] (Proper 18) September 4, 2016

LUKE 14:25-35

25 Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them, 26 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. 27 Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. 28 For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? 29 Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, 30 saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' 31 Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? 32 And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. 33 So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple. 34 "Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? 35 It is of no use either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown away. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.

Jesus gives to the sinner a God. To have a God is to have one to whom you look for every good gift, to look to in every distress, to hold onto in every fear, to have one to trust as your refuge as you wake up and as you lie down.

For the sinner, Jesus leaves no uncertainty of where to look for rescue from sin, no doubt about God's gift of life and care for the sinner, no misgivings about whether the grace and mercy of God is for him. Jesus wants the sinner to hear the Name of his Father in such a way that the sinner won't cower in fear, but instead, with a heart of faith, will trust in God the Father, holding onto to God with a sure and full confidence.

In order to give to us a true God, to bestow upon us the faith and trust that God the Father is the only one we need to look to for every good gift, indeed, is the only One we are given to look to, Jesus pushes aside our false gods, he knocks down everything, every effort, every institution, every person, we are tempted to look to for refuge, for safety, for every good gift, rather than looking to God alone. This is the stuff of the 1st Commandment. Exodus 20:3:

[The Lord said,] "I am the LORD your God, ... You shall have no other gods before Me."

Jesus knows the human heart. He knows our inclination to take a good gift from his Father and treat it as something we, ourselves, possess, something we make our own and control in such a way we can find our refuge in it, instead of it being ours purely by gift. We take a good gift from God, and we find ourselves, instead of loving the Lord our God with all our heart, loving

the gift according to what we can get out of it. And Jesus rescues the sinner from that. He hits us with jarring language, shaking us to the core:

[Jesus said,] 26 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does

not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.”

[Luke 14:26]

You don't cut closer to the bone than telling the sinner he must hate his own parents and children if he is to be a disciple of the Son of God. But Jesus knows the human heart, and he knows how we create our false gods. He knows how we will find our confidence and trust in things or institutions or persons other than God his Father. So he tells us that anything other than his Father that we love and to which we look for our safety and refuge, we must do with it and hate it. Matthew 22:38:

[Jesus said,] “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment.”

And then we may see the gifts our Father gives us. Jesus gives to us his Father as our true God in whom we can place all faith and trust, from whom we are given to receive every good gift, and then we can turn to our parents, to our children, our brothers and sisters, to our neighbor, and we can receive them no longer as something we possess of our own, no longer something or someone we look to for what good they are to us or what we can get out of them, but we can receive them as gifts from our Father who loves us and gives us every good gift. We can receive them according to how our Father gives them to us, parents to respect, children to love and train up in the Lord's word, neighbor to love and serve—all as gifts from our Lord.

In startling language, Jesus shows us our sin in how we can take gifts from our Father for what they are to us, and for what we can get out of them, and, removing us from that, Jesus gives us our heavenly Father to hold onto, to trust in, and from whom alone we may receive every good gift.

Seeing a field of grain, we can trust in the grain itself, seeing an automatic act of nature, expecting it to yield for us the food we want—forgetting that God our Father created the very seeds of grain, sent forth the rain, and gave the gifts and the ability to the farmer to reap the produce. Because, as sinners, we can reference any gift to ourselves and what we demand of it; that is, we can turn any gift into an idol. We may think of any gift the Father gives us—our spouse, our family, our church, our workplace, our neighbor, our country—any gift, and in our sin we will end up falsely trusting in it for what it is to us, looking at it or at him or her for what we can expect or get out of them; and to all our false confidences in things or persons or institutions, Jesus tells us to hate it. Hate it, be done with it, push it aside—

“Love the LORD your God with all your heart,” [Jesus said,] “and with all your soul, and with all your mind ... you shall have no other gods before him.”

And in that, in giving us his Father to be our Father, Jesus gives us all things as gifts from God our Father. For Jesus is the One—the only One—who did give up everything he had, including even his own life, as a gift from his Father. His Father gave him to be the suffering Servant standing in the place of all those who had made gifts from God into their own idols, and to shed the atoning blood to cleanse every sinner. Jesus received that gift, he went to the cross, and now he gives to us, those purchased by his blood, the gift of his Father as our Father.

We now receive every good gift from the hand of his Father. Our spouses: the husband is given to love his wife, the wife to love her husband, as gifts from the Father. Our parents: we now receive them from the hand of our Father in Heaven, knowing that they serve in his stead. Our children, our own lives, our neighbor, all not possessions according to what we may expect out of them, but good gifts from our Father.

Jesus said,

[Jesus said,] “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind [and] You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

In giving us his Father as our God and Father, Jesus has given us all things as good gifts from him.

And he has done it by making us his disciples. And he makes us his disciples by breaking down our idols, our false confidences, by forgiving our idolatry, and by placing in front of us, instead, his Father. His Father given to us as our Father, who makes us his own by sending his own Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins, to be our Savior, and to be our Teacher who is always giving gifts to his disciples.

“Therefore,” [says Jesus,] “any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.”

[Luke 14:33]

So Jesus gives us to renounce the false confidences we have built up, to reject the trust we have placed in things other than God, and Jesus turns us to his Father. He is the Lord our God to whom we look for every good gift of body and soul, from whom we receive the gifts our family, of our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, and of our neighbor, and him who we hold onto in every distress and fear, trusting in him as our refuge as we wake up and as we lie down. For he forgives our sin and makes us his own in his Son Jesus Christ, our Lord.

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.