

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Jesus reminds us today that discipleship is hard. This can be a troubling realization to novice disciples. They can get the idea that discipleship is the way of ease and comfort. Jesus reminds us today how wrong that is.

To be Jesus' disciple is to be a follower of Him and His teaching. It is the way of faith, and faithfulness, the psalmist says, is meditating on His wondrous works, clinging to His testimonies, understanding the way of His precepts, and running in the way of His commandments. Similarly, Moses told Israel of the way of the Lord: namely, *"loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him."*

This is the way of life and of blessing, but not necessarily ease or comfort, for Jesus' testimonies aren't easy. They challenge His disciples. *"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."*

These words seem harsh, and perhaps even contradictory. Shall I not love and cherish my father and mother? Honor them? Serve and obey them? Surely we should; it's what the 4th commandment requires. And God is not contradicting Himself. So, what is going on here?

Shall I not love my wife, but hate her and my children? What of Paul's instruction: *"Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her"* (Eph. 5:25)? Paul is not arguing against Jesus. Shall I hate my brothers and sister? Or even my own life? Again, St. Paul: *"no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it"* (Eph. 5:29). Rightly so. Our lives are gifts from God. Again, St. Paul reminds us: *"he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything"* (Acts. 17:25). *"The body is [meant] for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ... glorify God in your body"* (1 Cor. 6:13, 20).

In fact, so precious is your life, body and soul, that the Lord redeemed it. *"You are not your own, for you were bought with a price"* (1 Cor. 6:19-20). *"Bless the LORD, O my soul,"* sings David, because He *"redeems your life from the pit"* and *"crowns you with steadfast love and mercy"* (Ps. 103:2, 4). And the ransom price He paid was high: the life of His only Son in exchange for ours (Mark 10:45). Or as Peter put it: *"you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot"* (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

So what is going on here that Jesus calls His disciples to *"hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life"* in order to be a disciple? Jesus is tearing down our most basic idolatries.

These you must give up, if you are to be one of His disciples. Our families, our own lives, as precious as these gifts are, cannot be number one. God says, He must be. That's what the First Commandment is all about: "You shall have no other gods. What does this mean? We should fear, love and trust in God above all things" (Luther, Small Catechism, First Commandment).

Okay. I can see that, but "hate"? Hate my mother and father? Hate my wife and children? Hate my brothers and sisters? Hate my own life? Art Just addresses this difficulty in his commentary. I quote: "Matthew records the softer formulation that makes 'hate' correspond to 'not love more than' (Mt 10:37), i.e., we are not to love family 'more than' Jesus and his kingdom. This is, in fact, the meaning of 'hate' here, but Luke preserves the semitic expression in all its hardness. This language of 'hate' comes from the Torah ..." (Just, *Concordia Commentary: Luke 9:51-24:53*, p. 580-81).

In your "What Doctor Luther Says" insert, you see how Luther makes a comparison of this New Testament saying with how Moses spoke in the Old. Luther said: "Christ speaks of 'hatred' of one's own mother and father, which is the name of an offense, even though it is the highest virtue." It's the highest virtue because Christ is talking about faith, salvation, discipleship. Thus, Luther says, "So also he who hates father and mother for Christ's sake does not hate them but loves them, as he who denies himself and loses his own life finds it."

For this is the end result of this faith — life and blessing: life eternal with Christ Jesus, the blessedness of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:10). But faith also is not without its challenges. There will be cross bearing, Jesus says. We must be ready. Philemon was asked to bear a financial cross as Paul was returning his slave back to him — don't treat him as a bondservant but as a brother.

In our own times, I'm thinking of the cost that Barronelle Stutzman of Arlene's Flowers endured as she sought to run her business honoring God's word. Or Jack Philips of Masterpiece Cakeshop, who is still in litigation having won in the Supreme Court once, but is still being attacked for his Christian witness. The attacks on him have been going on for a decade. Or Lorie Smith of 303 Creative who is being coerced into creating artwork that conflicts with her religious beliefs. She's going to the Supreme Court this fall.

I'm thinking of Wisconsin Lutheran High School in Milwaukee being targeted by the city of Milwaukee for \$105,000 of taxes on this non-profit, Lutheran school. That's in litigation, and yes, governments are seeking to tax religious schools and other non-profits. Don't think that churches are far behind. And remember, this is a Lutheran school in a city with a large Lutheran population. Or a case recently decided that involved the Baltimore Lutheran High School Association — I would

say, we Lutherans have not yet lost our saltiness. I imagine that this case will be appealed. The District Court says that non-profit, religious schools will have to make accommodations for students who are confused about their gender, regardless of their religious convictions.

We will have crosses to bear, and Jesus says, we should be ready for them. We should count the cost — discipleship will not be easy; it won't be comfortable. Besides the financial burdens, there will also be ridicule and scorn, rejection and persecution. Nevertheless, Jesus says, “*Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you*” (Matt. 5:11-12). For your faithfulness, you are still promised blessing and life.

Finally, brothers and sisters, I want to return to this language of family and speak to how this applies to church. Matthew and Mark report of a time when Jesus was speaking to the people, and His mother and brothers were outside seeking to speak to Him. But He told the man: “*Who is my mother, and who are my brothers? And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother’*” (Matt. 12:48-50).

You became one of Jesus' disciples as you were baptized and came to faith; you entered into a new family, and this new family is the family of primary import — the family of God is. That doesn't mean that you ignore your natural family or despise it (I have brothers and a sister), but the natural family is no longer the primary relationship. The church is, with your brothers and sisters in Christ; you are my brothers and sisters as we are in Christ, as Jesus said, “*My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it*” (Luke 8:21).

Therefore, God grant us true discipleship, a faithfulness in loving the Lord our God and walking in His ways. God keep us faithful in receiving His word and sacraments, strengthening us to love others. God grant us blessing as we seek to “*do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith,*” our Christian family. The Lord keep us as salty Lutherans.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.