

Year C – 13th Sunday after Pentecost; Lectionary 23 – September 7, 2025

Pastor Megan Floyd

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Psalm 1

Luke 14:25-33

Grace and peace to you from God, our Creator, and from Jesus, our Savior, who urges us to choose life, so that we may live. Amen.

These are some challenging words from Jesus today.

...Reminds me of the good news from a few weeks ago, when Jesus said he did not come to bring peace, but division... these words make me catch my breath.

Yet they are part of the Good News and have been set before us... and so today, we will wrestle with them... together.

“Whoever comes to me and does not hate their family, and yes, even life itself, cannot be my disciple.”

Is Jesus really telling us that... hate... is a mark of discipleship?

Isn't God supposed to be all about love?

Isn't the greatest commandment, above all the others... You shall *love* the Lord, your God, and then... you shall *love* your neighbor as you *love* yourself.

Yes! Jesus did say that! ...and it wasn't new information... he was drawing from Deuteronomy and Leviticus, which his listeners would have known.

And what about the fourth commandment... You shall honor your father and mother?

How are we to follow God's commandment to honor our parents if Jesus states that we cannot become his disciples unless we hate them?

We call the gospels Good News... but Good News... isn't always easy to hear. And yet... it is still good.

It is good because it comes from God, who is, indeed, all about love. But it requires us to make choices... choices between life and death... blessings and curses.

Choose to fear and love the Lord, your God, above all else.

The one who created you, who loved you into existence, desires for you to put God and God's commandments before everything else.

Following God has always been about loving God above all else... because we are so loved.

And we know... we know... that following God's will for us... that following God's commandments does, in fact, lead to a full life blessed with love and abundance...

...it leads to communities that care for the needs of others, where all people are valued and supported, and where everyone has enough.

Even though God desires for us to choose this life and these blessings... it still comes with a cost.

See, the common thread between our texts today is God's desire for us to first recognize *all* that God offers us... *all* that God has laid out for us to consider... and then to make the choice, the only choice... that leads to a flourishing life.

...not just for us alone, for we are not meant to be alone... but a flourishing life as communities that have chosen to love God above all else.

Choose life... so that you may live... but count the costs of this life of discipleship so you don't make this choice blindly... and you will know ...that what God offers is good.

We know all about making choices... and we know all about making sacrifices for those choices.

There are the little choices we make every day, like choosing a healthy lunch over fast food, because we know that while that burger and fries might taste great in the moment... if that was all we ate, every day... we wouldn't feel so great.

And generally what you choose to eat for lunch doesn't become your whole identity... it doesn't demand that you put everything and everyone else as secondary.

That would be crazy.

But there are choices we make... sacrifices we make... that require this of us... like for example... the choice to play youth travel sports.

Working in youth ministry, I regularly lamented the rise in popularity of youth travel sports. Maybe some of you have had your kids involved in travel teams, I don't know...

And if you did and loved them, you might get angry with me about this...

But here's my perspective from the ministry side of things.

Whenever one of my church youth joined a travel team, it was pretty much the death blow to whatever life of faith they and their family had been developing until that point.

Participation in travel teams demanded that everything else be sacrificed.

First, the family had to invest thousands of dollars every year for their child to be on the team, which wasn't even a guarantee they'd play.

And, it was a *travel* team, so every weekend, the family would be traveling for games... and over the years, it seemed that weekends alone weren't enough, so they started planning for other games during the week.

These teams insisted that for the athlete to be successful, every available moment needed to be devoted to the travel team.

The team was the highest priority, and if you challenged that, you couldn't be on the team.

And so, these kids sacrificed a lot. They sacrificed any opportunity to be involved in anything else with their school or friends.

They sacrificed their grades as they struggled to balance school and their commitments to the team.

And they sacrificed their faith, and any relationships their family had been nurturing at their church... all of this was sacrificed on the altar of youth travel sports.

And for what? ...for the hope that someday they might play professionally? I suppose... it occasionally happens, but not usually.

Everything in their world became focused on themselves and the game...

Their parents supported it, or often even pushed their kid to do it, because they thought they were giving them the best chance to get ahead in this life... in this culture.

And... it always broke my heart. Always.

Because, in my observations... once a family chose to sacrifice everything for youth travel sports... sacrifice everything for their child's individual teenage success, it was almost impossible to bring them back around to the importance of their faith community.

There would be no more opportunities to show them the incredible transformation in ourselves and in the people around us when we choose, not to live just for ourselves, but to live for God and others.

There would be no more opportunities to show them how much loving others, as God loves us, is actually one of the most beautiful blessings of all.

And no more opportunities to walk with them on their faith journey, when the doubt creeps in, or they get angry with God about something that happened...

To be able to offer the kind of reassurance that can only come from the people in your faith community who are with you on that journey, and can speak into your experience.

Now please understand... I know that youth travel sports are not really the problem... and I'm sure not all of them are as intense as the ones I encountered.

They are a product of our culture that tells us every day that if you aren't focused on your own personal gain and success, then you've already lost.

But that's actually contrary to God's desire for us...we weren't created to be alone... we weren't created to toil away as individuals.

We were created to succeed and flourish *as a people* when we love and honor God first, and love and honor our neighbors... when we follow God's commandments.

By prioritizing God and the collective needs of the community over our own, we discover what God knew to be true all along... we discover that our hearts and lives are transformed, and we are abundantly blessed.

This life of discipleship... this life of following Jesus... leads to an abundant life... but it comes with a cost.

We must be willing to put God first in our lives... before all else...

and to trust that God is faithful and true in God's promise... that what God has set before us is life and prosperity... and death and adversity.

And God wants us to choose life, and that life is good.

So the mark of discipleship is not hatred for your family... no... the mark of discipleship is love for God above everything else.

And when you love God above all else, it becomes your identity...

and it becomes the lens through which you look at everything and everyone around you... so you see the world as God sees it.

You see the world through God's lens of perfect love.

It's a breathtaking view... a costly view, and the choice is yours to make... and the Good News is... God is going to keep putting this choice in front of you.

God is going to keep putting this choice in front of you, no matter how far you have wandered, and no matter how much you have decided that the life of discipleship is too hard.

The Good News is... God isn't going to give up on you... because God loves you, and really wants you to choose life.

Amen.