All Saints Church September 8, 2019

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost Year C/Proper 18

Deuteronomy 30:15-20 Philemon 1-21

Psalm 1 Luke 14:25-33

Grant us, O Lord, we pray thee, to trust thee with all our heart. Amen

I like Subarus (the New England car of choice). And I’ve noticed a new color…. Orange, for the Crosstreks. What an awful color! There’s one right across the street. Who would buy an orange car?

One of my closest friends just bought a brand new Subaru- Crosstrek….. baby blue… And I asked her how she picked out the color. And she told me that she really wanted orange, but that she had to wait too long for it, so she settled for the baby blue color.

“Why would you want orange?” I asked her.

“Oh, the color reminds me of the Golden Gate Bridge- that’s why I wanted it.”

“Wow, exactly,” I thought. We both love San Francisco and the Golden Gate Bridge. And so now, every time I see an orange car, I am filled with wonderful memories of my youth in San Francisco and my friendship with Mercy. I love the color of orange cars!

What happened? I think I just put on a different pair of glasses to see my world. And with those different glasses, my point of view changed. I think Jesus is trying to shock us this morning into checking what kind of glasses we have on as we look out into reality.

So much is happening right now for All Saints. Our parking lot is near completion, as well as our organ console. Our ministries are flourishing; there is a lot of good energy as we prepare for Homecoming Sunday next Sunday. We have births just around the corner and baptisms. I have two weddings, and we will be honoring a life well lived when we celebrate with thanksgiving the beauty of Virginia Peterson’s 98 years on this earth.

The full cycle of life- birth, marriage, death, all thresholds we cross that define who we are and how we want to live.

Christ is present in these transitional moments by promising life in death, hope in birth, grace in vow-making, and fulfillment in ministries.

So it’s a little jarring, to say the least, to read: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and his mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, even his own life, he cannot be a disciple of mine.”

Let’s throw a little water on our party Jesus!! How are we to understand Jesus’ exhortation? Especially when the reading from Deuteronomy is about choosing life, while Jesus is saying “hate, even your own life.” I’m not going to resolve all of this tension, but we do need to “unpack” the word HATE.

Hate is not a feeling word in the Aramaic language, the language that Jesus spoke.

In other words, Hate, the way we think of it, is filled with a lot of emotion. To hate someone is to have rage… to want to destroy… to be filled with fury.

This word, Hate, as we think of it does not exist in the Aramaic as hate. This type of passion (which can be the flip side of love), is not expressed in the word Hate. A Hate which evokes rage and a desire to destroy is best translated as Despise.

As in, “I despise your false rituals, your lack of integrity, your indifference.”

Hate, when referenced in Aramaic, is primarily a word marking Priority. Hate in Aramaic means to detach oneself, to leave aside, to try to be objective without a lot of emotions getting in the way. To prioritize not yourself, our what others think of you, but rather to prioritize the needs of your community and others as a way to find empathy, joy, hope and determination. To be other-centered. This leaves you free to find God’s unity.

As Jesus continues (paraphrased if I may), “you may want (desire) to build a tower, but you need to detach yourself from that emotion and calculate the cost and understand the commitment to building a foundation.”

Here’s an example: We may want to have children. But do we understand the responsibility that child-bearing has? Well, the quick answer is no…. who can ever fully comprehend what it means to have a child, but it’s worth thinking through, at least at some level, what it will require? To become other-centered as we think about this new idea- how will we rely on the grace of God. It’s the reason we baptize children within the church service- we need our community to help us raise our children.

This is how the Aramaic mindset uses the word “Hate.” It means to be detached from your wants and desires as you explore making choices. Experience your feelings, without allowing feelings to control you. Not easy. But this “detachment” allows you to see in new ways. To put on a new pair of glasses which often will weed out our private fixations or neediness or our tiresome concerns or our preoccupation about the myth of our own self-reliance.

I think the Gospel now makes so much more sense. Not only do we see in new ways, but if we combine the passion of Jesus with our own power of detachment, we are making ourselves more available to God.

I think this passage (with Jesus’ prodding) is connected to how we live in hope.

When we ask our world’s leaders who have suffered, like MLK, Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Doris Day, they talk about detachment as a way to love more deeply and not to give up, no matter how bad it all looks, looked.

Vaclav Havel, after becoming President of the Czech Republic, discussed what it was like to be imprisoned during his country’s oppressive regime. How in the world did he endure?

He made an important distinction about hope: “Optimism has to do with doing something because you are certain that things will get better. Hope has to do with being certain that what you are doing is just, regardless of whether things get better or not.”

You are living in hope when you put your life into God’s hands and make yourself available to the moving of the Spirit. I think this is what Jesus is advocating. Not easy.

A parishioner this week, who is holding a lot of people she loves in prayer because they are facing difficult life changes, asked me, “How do you do it, Jamie? I can hold a few people who are hurting in my prayers, but you are called to hear everyone’s pains every day.”

My response was quick, “Oh, I can only do this by being in community with all of you. By being in prayer. And there is a detachment, not from passion or love or care, but rather from end results…. You have to detach yourself from rewards, or good feelings or happy endings.”

We can be full of hope because we are in God’s hands, in the unity of God’s vision and design.

The small print of our Baptism vows reminds us of this. We desperately love our children, but we are commanded to detach and set them free…. in order for them to live and claim their own lives. To listen, to honor, to let them fall, to believe in them, to guide, but not to control.

We choose life, and we put on a new pair of glasses, filtering the world through hope and love. When we do this, we leave the world of “information” to live a life in the fullness of knowledge and wisdom, undergirded by God’s presence in all things. AMEN