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Deuteronomy 30: 15-20

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in God's ways, and observing the commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying God, and holding fast to God; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

Luke 14: 25-35

Now large crowds were traveling with him; and he turned and said to them, 'Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, "This fellow began to build and was not able to finish." Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

Salt is good; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure heap; they throw it away. Let anyone with ears to hear listen!

## SERMON:

In our scripture, Jesus is talking to the crowds, the everyday folks. You and me.

Seems pretty obvious that Jesus did not have a PR person - no public relations in his messaging, no one helping him create an image that's inviting and sexy - no Jesus was

TERRIBLE at selling a message that sounds alluring. What he said to this crowd? - not a positive way to recruit followers! Jesus did not read the manuals on church growth - he seems to have a way of ticking off leadership, saying crazy stuff that annoys everybody!

Can you imagine a church sign that says: Follow Christ: Hate your family!

But Jesus wasn't about collecting followers, he was about creating a new way to live -

a life rooted in the call from Deuteronomy that says 'choose; that real life, a Jesus' centered way of life, is found by loving the Lord your God, and walking in God's ways.

No, Jesus wasn't about collecting followers - he was about so much more - about offering a model of ***discipleship that asks us to choose life by walking a new way, carrying the cross of love.***

So this is a hard passage on many levels, but let's start out by looking at the beginning of our scripture, where Jesus says: "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple."

Most English translations use the word 'hate' - 'whoever comes to me and does not *hate* father and mother'... and hate is such a loaded word for us, usually filled with a sense of aggression and ill-will. In the culture of that time, the Greek word used might better be translated as disregard<sup>1</sup> - 'whoever comes to me and does not disregard mother and father'...

Hate - not anger, aggression, ill-will. In this system it's more about shame/honor - it's about 'disregard'. Jesus isn't saying that family is unimportant, but he's expanding our understanding, calling us to widen the table - *everybody* is important.

This isn't necessarily a new teaching from Jesus -

A few chapters back in the gospel of Luke, Jesus said he came to bring fire to the earth - that he hasn't come to bring peace but division - that households will be divided against each other - fathers against sons; mothers against daughters...

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<sup>1</sup> [Lectionary Greek: Luke 14:25-33](#)

And earlier in this chapter he told the host of a meal to not invite friends or relatives - but when you host a big meal, Jesus instructed, invite the poor; invite those who cannot repay you.

Jesus is breaking down the system of hierarchy - in all aspects of communal life, including the sacred structure of the family.

Families in his time were everything - your safety net, your nursing home, your retirement plan.

Remember, my friends, Jesus isn't just talking to his closest followers here - he's talking to the crowd, the everyday folk. 'Whoever comes to me...Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.'

This is for all of us - anyone wanting to follow this guy.

Even today, families (including churches) tend to be insular. We care for our own.

Our brains appear to be somewhat wired this way - back in the 1990's, the British evolutionary anthropologist Robin Dunbar<sup>2</sup> theorized that we lose the ability to function well as a social group when there's more than 150 of us. We are wired for small communities.

After Dunbar's research came out, the leadership in the company Gor-Tex did their own research, and discovered that if more than 150 employees were working together in one building, different social problems started to occur. The company started building with a limit of 150 employees and only 150 parking spaces in every building. When the parking spaces were filled, the company would build another 150-employee building. Sometimes these buildings would be placed only short distances apart.<sup>3</sup>

While 150 is not a magical number, and other studies vary widely on how many we can truly connect with in meaningful ways, Jesus' radical call to democratize who and how we love, is revolutionary, and requires us to stretch, grow, move outside our comfort zones. Choosing life, choosing to Love God and neighbor is not an easy road.

Makes me ask myself: *Do I really want to be a disciple of Christ?*

Honestly, do I think about others, other people's kids, other people's family as much as I consider my own? No. I don't. We don't. I, and likely most of us, confess that as sin - a sin we're willing to own, but not necessarily repent of - repent being a willingness to change our ways.

God's love is really big. Is this what it means to carry our cross? To open our arms wide?

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<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dunbar%27s\\_number](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dunbar%27s_number)

<sup>3</sup> IBID.

***Christ invites us to discipleship - to be followers; asking us to choose life by walking a new way, carrying the cross of love.***

Coming back to our scripture, it's important to notice that this passage is written in the present tense, signifying that these actions are on-going. Hate, or disregard, your family; carry your cross. These are not one time choices - they are new ways of living. Everyday living.

You've got to take up your own cross and be willing to give up the safety net of tradition and comfort. Jesus is saying: You have to trust me and my way.

You've got to give it all up.

Professor and writer Karoline Lewis challenges us to consider the cross as representative of what life is. She says that to carry the cross involves the choices and burdens and realities of a life that has made a certain commitment — a commitment to a way of life that is dedicated to bringing about the Kingdom of God here and now.

Carrying the cross is choosing, day in and day out, over and over, a new way of living.<sup>4</sup>

Carrying your cross means I'm going to consider, through the lens of loving God and walking in God's ways (Deut. 30:16), what abundant life looks like for everyone.

You might be one who feels strong in your faith, finding ways to live out this call to choose life, day in and day out - loving your students with a deep compassion, building relationships with refugee families in our community, engaging in conversations across race and political divides. Bless you who have a sense of what it means, in this day and age, to carry the cross of love.

For others though -

Carrying your cross might involve struggling to figure out what you believe about God and Jesus and faith in general.

I've heard from some in our congregation how the past couple of years has led to some deep questioning,  
important questioning,  
uncomfortable questioning.

Some of you aren't sure what you believe anymore, and so find it harder to engage in church and to step up and lead with integrity.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.workingpreacher.org/dear-working-preacher/carrying-the-cross>

Yes, Carrying your cross might involve struggling to figure out what you believe about God and Jesus and faith.

Staying engaged with that struggle; taking seriously the doubts and the discomfort of an old understanding of Jesus and the call of the changing church - maybe that's a way to pick up your cross and follow.

Staying in the work of seeking, of expanding our understanding of what God is - the question of what do I really believe - that might be how you most honestly pick up your cross. Staying in the work, the exploration of a new way - that's discipleship. That's following.

Jesus tells his listeners to give up their possessions - give up the things that possess them - maybe that's ideas, or certainty, or old ways of doing things. We can hold onto so much!

Jesus doesn't tell the crowd they have to have it all figured out to be his disciple, to learn from him and join him - he asks for a willingness to engage in the hard work of everyday choice - to choose again and again to stay connected; to widen the table; to live a life of integrity rooted in love.

Wherever you find yourself on the path - seeking;  
choosing the hard work of love,  
that's a cross that holds life,  
an abundant life where maybe, just maybe, we'll live into God's kingdom here, and now.