

Thirteenth Sunday of Pentecost/September 8, 2019
Luke 14:25:35/Faithful to the Word
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church
Pastor Jerry Stobaugh

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

I am sure most of you have heard the phrase “Blood is thicker than water.” Meaning the welfare of the family has top priority over other considerations. We generally use this phrase to explain an unusual decision or an action. Families are the basic building blocks of society and family bonds should be very strong.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus tells us there is one circumstance that must reverse this saying. Jesus said, “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.” When the water is that of baptism, it should have priority over the blood of our earthly relationships. When the water is the water of baptism, God adopts us into His family. God makes us His sons and daughters, so we have a new family in Jesus Christ. In today’s Gospel, Jesus teaches our relationship with Him has priority over all other relationships including the relationships of our earthly family and even the relationship we have with our own life.

Jesus said, “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.” Then as if this was not enough, he went on to say, “Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.”

When Jesus talks about bearing a cross, He is not talking about the normal hassles and problems that afflict us daily. Yes, it can be

frustrating when the kids don't behave; or when a disease strikes us down or unemployment comes. These are all hardships caused by sin and we should not minimize them, but they are not crosses.

Our cross is the hardship we endure simply because we are faithful to God's Word. It is the attack the world mounts against us because we believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

Looking at the history of the Holy Christian Church, we see the blood of the martyrs spilled on almost every page. The Holy Spirit inspired the writer of Hebrews to describe the martyrs thus: [Heb 11:35-38] "...Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated - of whom the world was not worthy - wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth."

So, what is Jesus telling us? He is saying the world hates the Children of God. He is saying the world will use all its resources against us, even our own families, even our own desire to survive. Jesus tells His disciples they must be ready to cut off ties to all our earthly relatives, rather than be unfaithful to Him. He is telling us we must be ready to lose our lives rather than be unfaithful to Him.

Can you do that? No, neither can I. I simply don't possess the resources to conform to Jesus' teaching in today's Gospel. In fact, the parables Jesus tells after these statements indicate we don't have the resources to carry them out. Our attempt to surrender all in order to be faithful is like a man who starts a tower he can't finish or like a king with ten thousand men facing a king with twenty thousand. The world will overwhelm us if we try to carry our cross under our own

power. We don't have the power to deny our family and follow Christ on our own. We simply can't do it alone.

Fortunately, we are not alone. The Holy Spirit inspired the writer of the book of Hebrews to also say, [Heb 4:15] "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." Jesus is our high priest who experienced the same attacks we do and triumphed over them.

Did the world use Jesus' family to attack Him? Saint Mark writes: [Mark 3:20-21] "Then [Jesus] went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, 'He is out of his mind.'" Later Jesus said, [Mark 3:34-35] "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother." Jesus Himself had to deny His own family in order to remain faithful.

Jesus Christ was also faithful to His cross. His cross was not just a metaphor, but the real thing. His death was not just persecution for being faithful. His death was the sacrifice that made us part of God's family. Understand, when Jesus endured His cross, He made sure there was one cross we would never have to endure; the cross we earn with our own sin. He took all our sins onto Himself and paid the debt we owed. By His faithful suffering and death on the cross, He triumphed over sin, death, and the power of the devil. In His triumph, He rose from the dead and ascended to heaven.

Jesus offers His victory to all people through the Holy Spirit's gift of faith. By faith, we receive adoption into God's family. He promises us we shall always be together. Before Jesus ascended to heaven He said, [Matt 28:20] "Behold, I with you am always, to the end of the

age.” His triumph means He is always by your side. He will be with you while you live here on this earth, and, when your time here is over, you shall live in heaven with Him forever.

Evil has no conscience; it attacks us with all its resources. It attacks us through family and friends; yes, even our own bodies. Despite this, we need not fear, for the Holy Spirit works and sustains us in faith. He gives us the strength to remain faithful despite the world’s persecution, even if it means losing family and friends, even if it means death because of our faith.

In the rite of confirmation, we hear these questions: Do you intend to hear the Word of God and receive the Lord’s Supper faithfully? Do you intend to live according to the Word of God, and in faith, word, and deed to remain true to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, even to death? Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it? We never answer these questions with a simple, “I do,” because we can’t. Instead we answer, “I do, by the grace of God.” For it is only by the grace of God you can be faithful to God even if the world threatens death or your family and friends ridicule you. By the grace of God, the Holy Spirit will keep your faith strong. God will be with you here in time and you will be with Him forever in eternity in the new heavens and the new earth.