

## SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

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Everything's good – Jesus is a new charismatic, exciting figure bringing fresh words and mighty deeds. He's grown more and more popular – but that's not enough.

- ❖ Jesus: “Don't be fair-weather fans, be disciples. And here's the cost of discipleship.”
- ❖ Have to understand that we can't fit Jesus into our lives and that we can only truly find our lives in Jesus
  - If we try to fit him in, he'll inevitably crush our existing framework; we'll find that we can't finish the tower because our foundation isn't strong enough
  - If we're always struggling to avoid the cross, we'll find that it's a fight we can't win
- ❖ No we have to understand from the beginning that we can't fit Jesus into our lives and that we can only truly find our lives in Jesus

This is one of several so-called “hard sayings” of Jesus because it's not immediately obvious how this makes us instruments of God's love, or gives us a peace that passes understanding.

- ❖ Now first of all, we can soften this hard saying a *little* by recognizing that Jesus is using a common Semitic style of providing a sharp and even exaggerated contrast to drive home the point.
  - Of course he's not encouraging a kind of aggressive opposition with those dearest to us
  - Would be contrary to loving our neighbor and honoring father and mother
- ❖ BUT the *essence* of this is *still true*, which is that we do need to hate, aggressively oppose *whatever* makes them *like* gods to *us*
  - *This* is actually where *true love* enters the *picture*, because when *anyone* in our life demands our *worship*, they become a spiritually *dangerous*, to us *and* to them

September 4, 2016

Clearly the danger to *us* is that this *keeps* us from loving *God* with everything we *have* and everything we *are*

- ❖ So rather than moving closer to *God*, and placing our *whole selves* in *his* care, we're putting more and *more* weight on a *shaky* foundation

The danger to *them* then is that instead of *selflessly* seeking *their* greatest good, which is the way *God* loves, *we're* loving them in a way that's *actually* about *us*

- ❖ This is what we mean when we describe cases of abuse by saying "they loved them *too much*"
- ❖ If our own dreams and happiness are somehow bound up in another person, it can eventually lead us to become manipulative or dominating
- ❖ It could also cause us to be too pleasing, needy and giving someone whatever they want simply isn't good for them, doesn't call the best out of them.
- ❖ Either way, whether *we're controlling* or *overindulging*, *we're* not *revealing* anything about *God* or disposing them to recognize his *love* at work in their lives.

What *Jesus* calls us to *instead* is a *healthy, spiritual detachment*, with *him* as the *foundation* and the *cross* as our *example*.

- ❖ Far from withdrawing from those around us, this detachment frees us to love those dear to us the way *Jesus* does, as a total gift of self.
- ❖ The *end* result is that we can love *God* first and last, and everything *else*, even our own *lives*, for *his* sake.

This is where we find the peace that passes all understanding, and it's what makes sense of what we see in the New Testament and the lives of the saints.

- ❖ Of Peter and John preaching *Jesus* in the temple the morning after they miraculously escaped being imprisoned for preaching *Jesus* in the temple
- ❖ Of saints and martyrs who with total freedom heroically cast their lives aside as a way of scattering the seeds of the gospel

They could do that only because instead of trying to fit Jesus into their lives, they found their life in him through the cross – and he's inviting us to do the same.

Is there something in your life that you simply love too much?

- ❖ Something that's off-limits, non-negotiable; something you try to keep out of God's reach?
- ❖ Don't be afraid to loosen your grip, and trust Jesus to love you better than you can love yourself.
- ❖ Don't worry about the cross or try to avoid it, you can't. We all suffer.
  - So take it up instead, and let Jesus share that burden,
  - So that in following him all the way to the cross, you can follow him also all the way from death to life.