

Provoked by the Parables at Brentwood Presbyterian

The King and the Tower

Oct 9, 2011

**Psalm 23 and Luke 14:25-33
(Hymns – 65, 485, 637, 680)**

This passage from Luke,
containing the the parables of the tower and the king,
is really about calculating the cost of discipleship.
What will it cost you to be a follower of Jesus Christ?
What do you have to give up?
What do you gain?

It's an interesting set of questions.
In their original context, these questions
confronted the Jews and Gentiles of the day
with the need to leave behind thier old attitudes and behaviours
and rehape or reform the way they saw things and did things.
Following Jesus brought about a radical change
in the way they lived their lives.
Loyalty to Jesus put older and other loyalties
in a whole new light.

Loyalty to God in Jesus Christ was more important
than any other loyalty in their lives –
father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, and self.
All these had to be given up
in order to form a new primary attachment in life.
That primary attachment was with God in Jesus Christ.
It was the Holy Spirit, working deep within a person's being,
who made this shift in loyalty possible,
but their had to be a conscious choice to make the shift,
to become a new person in Christ.
The command to love – God, neighbour, and self –
took precedence over everything.
With God first and foremost in that flow of the dynamic of love,
the old loyalties that were shaped by parental influence and social conventions
were changed by this bold new call to reach out in the new ways
Jesus Christ was showing them in his own life and teachings.

Let's take an example from the parable
immediately before the passage we read this morning.
It's the Parable of the Great Feast.
The simple point Luke is emphasizing in his version of this parable
is the inclusive nature of the kingdom of heaven.
Jesus came into a community and a society
where people were divided –
by race, by wealth, by belief systems, by moral norms, by status and power.
If you read the Gospels carefully,
if you immerse yourself in the teachings of Jesus daily,
if you read with the fresh eyes of the Spirit,
you will see this theme of inclusivity throughout the message of Jesus.
Include the lame, the crippled, the blind, the poor,
the moral outcasts – the prostitutes and the tax collectors.
Be humble before God and welcome them into your community
because they are all beloved children of you heavenly Father.
They are all your brothers and sisters in the kingdom of heaven.
Old human family loyalties, old human divisions that you learned from childhood,
old human ways of dividing people into good guys and bad guys,
must be given up.

Jesus, in order to make his point forcefully,
goes so far as to say you must *hate* your father and mother,
your wife and children, your brothers and sisters, your self
in order to accept this new ultimate loyalty to him,
in order to be his disciples,
in order to follow him.

By that *hate*, you break the old attachments.
You give up the old loyalties to family and self
as the ultimate loyalties in life,
as the true source of all obligations.
In the light of your new view of reality,
with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit at the centre of your loyalties,
you develop a new, richer, and more authentic relationship
with your human family and yourself.
This is not a hatred that rejects.
It is a hatred of a more narrow and confining way of seeing things
and an acceptance of God's broader hospitality.
In the community of the kingdom of heaven,
when you are in Jesus Christ, loyal to Jesus Christ, unified with Jesus Christ,
"for you there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles,
Between slaves and free men, between men and women:
You are all one in union with Christ Jesus." (Gal 3:28)

These words from Paul's letter to the Galatians capture the essence of what Jesus was teaching in these parables. This sense of community *and* equality is central to Paul's theology, especially in his encouragement to the Galatians.

What unifies and makes us equal has nothing to do with family loyalties or loyalty to self. It has to do with God being faithful to his promise to Abraham to make his descendants of all races a blessing to the whole creation.

Hate loyalties, Jesus and Paul are saying, that prevent you from being a blessing in that broad, inclusive sense. If loyalties divide you from other human beings and from the creation itself, then get rid of them.

Those lesser loves divide, distort, and destroy. The love of God in Jesus Christ unites, clarifies, and enlivens.

Only an ultimate loyalty to God in Jesus Christ working through the Spirit will lead to the kind of humility and hospitality seen in Jesus Christ.

So, like a builder figuring out how best to construct a tower, or a king figuring out whether to make war or make peace, Jesus is confronting us with the cost of discipleship and asking whether we are prepared to accept the cost.

Are we ready to follow him to and through the cross, where the hatred of all those who benefited from division and inequality did its best to dismiss and destroy the power of loyalty to the God of Abraham, the God who desires the blessings of community and equality?

That's the cost of discipleship. At every turn, in every opportunity, seek community and equality. If old loyalties, old attachments, old loves interfere with that mission, get rid of them.

Embrace with delight God's hospitality and enjoy getting to know the other guests at the great feast.