

Sermon for the Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost September 7, 2025 jj
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Suppose a certain church had a vacancy on their “family life ministry” team. Jesus applies for the job and then starts saying things like: Hate your father and mother. Hate your children. Hate your own life. I don’t think that will get Him the job, do you? So what is it about this demand that Jesus makes of you, the Christian? Why does the Gospel of Luke continue on this theme of conflict and division that threatens to dominate the course of your life? To relate to our other readings of the day, why is it that Paul makes such great demands of his partner in the Gospel, Philemon? Why must this businessman continue to suffer the loss that he had, and even on top of that, turn around and consider the servant who hurt him and fled away, now he should be thought of as a brother, and Philemon must welcome Onesimus back not as a servant, but as an equal in the church? What gives Moses, the leader who fell in a moment of anger and squandered his chance to enter the Promised Land, what gives him the moral ground to demand a decision from the people who are poised to cross the Jordan with Joshua, whether they will be faithful to the Lord or not? Or consider the Catechism we practiced today: why should we be expected to pause at least 5 times a day to say prayers at mealtimes, morning and evening? I thought Christians don’t need rules like that in their lives.

Even though it seems like God is laying these impossible burdens upon us; that Jesus is instigating this unreasonable conflict even within our own families, the point is really that the problem is with ourselves. That is to say, our sinful human nature inside of us is so tuned in to the desire of self-gratification, that even the gifts that we know come exclusively from God, even those gifts run the risk of turning into idols and false gods. Our Almighty Creator and Redeemer is not joking when He says in the Ten Commandments that He is a jealous God. He

demands exclusive obedience, fear, devotion, commitment, self-sacrifice. It is He who made us, and not we ourselves. Not only are you expected to pray five times a day, He says, Pray without ceasing! Do you love your family member more than you love God? Then both of you are at risk of eternal punishment, that is, separation from Him! Did you count it pure joy the last time you suffered persecution and trials of all kinds? I didn’t think so. And to be perfectly honest with you, I didn’t either. What hope is there for us who so often fall short of what God in His holy Law demands of our faith and requires of us in our faithfulness to Him?

I think part of our answer lies in what Luke lays out earlier in chapter 14, and it should be read together with Jesus’ difficult statements about hatred for family and self. It speaks about a royal invitation to a banquet. Those who were first invited sent back excuses, citing obligations that they couldn’t get out of, even though each of them, namely fields, work animals and a spouse, all of them deserve to fall under the heading of gifts to be enjoyed. But because they rejected the invitation, the offer to attend the banquet went instead to the poor, crippled and the blind. That’s where you and I find our hope and certainty. That’s who we can be, through repentance planted in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, we’re stripped bare of all our allurements to things of this world, even though the things themselves may not be wrong for us to have. We must beware not to make these gifts, even the precious gifts of house and home, wife and children, money, goods, and the like, take the place of the Lord who made us, who gave us these gifts in the first place, and sent us Jesus Christ His only Son, who paid for our ultimate and highest gifts, the forgiveness of our sins and the guarantee of our bodies’ resurrection and our life of the world to come.

God says hate the closest people in your life, and as it first reaches our ears, it makes no sense. Allow me to let you in on a secret: God's hatred, as described for us in the Bible, is of quite a different sort of hatred as we are used to see in this world. The evil hatred found within the world's sins of racism, violence, murder, extortion and so on, only heightens the fact that God's goodness is despised to mankind's peril. But when God says something like "Jacob I loved, Esau I hated," (in Romans 9) God is not employing some sinister trick that denies Esau even the chance to be saved. The reality is, Esau, and all others like him who put their trust in themselves and hold on to God's gifts as replacements for God Himself, they are rejected from the kingdom. Their faithfulness is not in the Lord who was good to them, and so their reward is complete, but only in this life.

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Those whom the Lord loves, are those forgiven sinners like you who have nothing else to cling to, but to Him alone. And so, in preference to your God and Savior, you have rejected all other things. You hate them, the way God hates them. They have no hold on you; Jesus is all you need. And then ironically, once you have fully let go of all those gifts that you may have idolized in the past, once Jesus who gave all He had in order to rescue you and buy you back, once your complete trust is in Him, He'll still give you the gifts He knows you need. It all hinges on the invitation—He gives you the opportunity to feast on His banquet, chew on His Word, consume the Body and Blood of Christ, pray to Him like you're drinking fine wine with your feast. You may be poor, crippled, blind to the temporary things of this world, but in God's kingdom, you're instead dressed in the royal robes of Jesus' perfection and goodness, yours at no cost. Nothing else in this world comes close, no hurt you may suffer in this life can ever equal or negate the blessing that is in store for you, indeed, by faith you know it's already yours. That's why you pray for it, morning, evening, and at the table.