

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

We are still doing our weekly Bible study on the gospel of Matthew, which was intentional given that we're spending much of this church year in that book. Purely by coincidence, given the relatively slow pace of our Bible study, much of what you heard me read a few moments ago, was included in our study this past Thursday.

As I mentioned in our Bible study, this is some pretty tough talk from Jesus, who is telling his disciples that it is not going to be easy to be his disciple. This is straight talk from our Lord, no hyperbole here!

Jesus is flat-out telling us that we are to love him more than anyone or anything else, that putting anyone or anything before him is to be unworthy of him. This is what he's talking about when he tells us that anyone who doesn't pick up the cross and follow him isn't worthy of him, that finding our lives means losing our lives, but losing our lives for his sake means finding our lives.

Because Jesus Christ is to be the center of our lives, without Jesus at the center we are not really living. Oh, we are here, we're alive, we exist, but we aren't living the abundant life we are called to live, that God wishes for us.

Now consider that in Jesus' time, the family was the basic building block of society, much more than it is even today. Your family was your identity, your profession in life. If you came from a family of fishermen, you were a fisherman, if your family herded sheep or tended a vineyard, then you herded sheep or tended a vineyard. For the most part, you had nothing to say about it. Kids back then didn't leave the family to go and build better lives for themselves. So now that you know a little bit more about the context and importance of the family, imagine the shock the disciples felt upon hearing this message from Jesus. Family was everything, you didn't move up the social ladder on your own, you stayed or moved with your family. Hearing Jesus turns your world, everything you value, upside down.

And now Jesus tells his disciples that your foes will come from the basic unit of society, from the last place you, or anyone else, would ever expect enmity, enmity which may result in your death as a disciple of Jesus. Jesus tells his disciples that he is to be first in their lives, no mistaking this message folks. He's not here to bring peace, that is a lack of strife, he brings a sword, in other words conflict. Remember that at one time, Jesus' own nuclear family thought of him as mad, as beside himself. Jesus is emphasizing that it is not easy to pick up the cross and follow him.

But, Jesus is bringing, has brought about, a new reality, sin and death have been defeated. Jesus invites us to walk as his disciples into new life, abundant life, life where the love we have for mom and dad, our sons and daughters, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, for one another, all flows from God through us, with Jesus at the center. Through the love of God for you and I, our new life started with Jesus' death on the cross, given strength through the resurrection, reinforced by baptism

and Holy Communion. God has the last word, death has lost its sting, the abundant life lived in Christ Jesus is before us as members of God's family, Christ our brother, renewed in the abundant life, dead to ourselves but alive in God with our sisters and brothers in the faith given us by the grace of God.

Our love for one another, for mom and dad, for our children and grandchildren, our relationships, our work together, all strengthened and affirmed by God, who gives us life, abundant life, not life that you may have all things, but life that you may enjoy all things.

We have been given grace and life, forgiveness and salvation for Jesus sake, finding new life in Jesus.

AMEN