

Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles
Sixteenth Sunday of Pentecost/Ordinary Time – September 4, 2016 – Communion
Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister

Luke 14:25-33

For Reflection

If one did not belong to a family, one had no real social existence. Jesus is therefore confronting the social structures that governed his society at their core. For Jesus, family ties faded into insignificance in relation to God’s imperial rule, which he regarded as the fundamental claim on human loyalty.

The Five Gospels, The Jesus Seminar p.353

**“The bond that links your true family is not one of blood,
but of respect and joy in each other’s life.”**

- Richard Bach, American novelist (b.1936)

Cost Estimates

Jesus was not a particularly nice person.

He was a story-teller, a truth-teller, a shaker-upper, a challenger of those in power and a compassionate companion of those without power.

But he wasn’t “nice.”

And when he said (which the Jesus Seminar believes he DID say), "Whoever comes to me and does not **hate** father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple..." he MEANT “hate”. And our illustrious scholars say that by “hate” he didn’t mean physical or verbal animosity – but he meant cutting “allegiance to.”

The parallel in Matthew is believed to be an attempt to soften the blow:

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me... Matthew 10:37

The purpose of using the word “hate” was to shock people – shake them up and cause them to think about their own participation in social structures that perpetuate injustice – that undercut G-d’s intentions.

So how did “loyalty to family” perpetuate injustice?

2000 years ago – in the Roman Empire – men were in charge. They owned the property and held public office and controlled religious institutions and made up the laws of society. Oldest sons inherited the family fortune (large or small). Fathers gave daughters away in marriage and made all important decisions for the family.

A person was known by their family name and position in the social hierarchy – which was one reason it was important for a father to choose a person of high rank for their daughter – who was to take the NAME of that new family. If a person was “dis-owned” by the family, they no longer HAD a place in society – they were nobody. So loyalty took precedence over personal preference or identity.

To choose a profession lower than one’s father’s was scandalous.

To marry for love was scandalous – especially if it ignored status or racial superiority.

If your father or husband died, too bad. You were basically a nobody – facing poverty and probably extinction.

And if you developed a disease or disability that indicated G-d no longer favored you – this was worthy of “dis-ownership”.

The idea that membership in G-d’s Family or Kin-dom or Beloved Community took precedence over blood or marital relationships was scandalous. And that is exactly what Jesus was saying. We are first and foremost children of G-d – and we live according to G-d’s rules, not human constructs.

And G-d’s rules include that we treat each other with equal respect – share all fortunes and resources – have compassion for those who are struggling – and challenge behaviors and laws that oppress or subjugate.

It’s a good thing that in this day and age we no longer depend on our families for social acceptance, right? Wrong.

The existence of an organization called FOCUS ON THE FAMILY proves that we’ve got it wrong.

The social laws that perpetrate the construct of INHERITANCE remaining within one family proves that we’ve got it wrong.

My own parents were DIS-inherited by their parents in the mid-1960’s when they began the process of adopting a child of color. Archaic yet modern behavior.

The continuing beliefs in many societies that “bringing shame upon the family” is the WORST of crimes – proves that we’ve got it wrong.

You’ve heard the saying, “You made your bed, you lie in it” – referring to abusive marriages – this is a perspective that is alive and well TODAY. Divorce is still scandalous – and eschewed by certain religious institutions – and a cause for ostracization.

Being dis-owned by one's family because of one's sexual orientation or gender identity is a popular practice these days.

What do you think Jesus would say about that?

Perhaps something along the lines of, "Blessed are those disowned by blood. They are beloved children in G-d's family."

One of the most popular story lines in books and movies is the one where someone loses their family or chooses to leave their family – and finds or creates family in a different way – based on idiosyncracies, common value systems, the common bonds of being "outsiders" together.

That's what the Jesus Movement started out being.

It was family for those who had none.

It was a place of justice and radical acceptance, extravagant welcome and outrageous generosity.

It was a place of level playing fields and challenge to the tilted status quo.

Dinner tables were occupied by people who shouldn't be eating together.

It was HORRIFYING to "normal" people.

In addition, it wasn't necessarily a community of really "nice" people. You can imagine the tensions that arose and the personality conflicts that caused rifts and the feelings that were hurt by honest dialogue and challenges to presuppositions. Those Jesus people had to work HARD to overcome the social filters instilled from birth and pressed upon them daily by the Roman Empire and the Religious Institutions. (A parallel could certainly be made with the tensions and dialogue that goes on in and around Burning Man. It's not all lala and joyful embracing of differences – no matter what the stated principles of the event might declare – like "radical inclusion" and "gift economy".)

Being a follower of Jesus was a huge social experiment and it was HARD.

It meant giving away all of your beloved possessions.

And it usually MEANT breaking affiliations with family – if you had one – and thereby losing social status – if you had any.

Being a follower of Jesus didn't mean you were NICE – it meant you were dedicated to a different set of social behaviors and expectations.

And there was a COST – a huge social and economic cost to making this choice.

Is there a social or economic cost to belonging to Mt. Hollywood UCC?

If not, why not? * What might that cost be for you?

Think about that as we share in a ritual of belonging – a ritual that declares war on the injustice of traditional social structures – and declares allegiance to something far more dangerous. The floor is open. Let's talk.

Luke 14:25-33

25 Now large crowds were traveling with him; and he turned and said to them, 26 **"Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.** 27 Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. 28 For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? 29 Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, 30 saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' 31 Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? 32 If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. 33 So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions."