

Luke 14:25-35
Pentecost 13C
September 8, 2019

“Divine Smelling Salts”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Have you ever seen a boxer who’s taken a hard punch that knocks him senseless ... they’re look to be in a daze and completely oblivious to the world around them? As they stagger to their corner, the trainer cracks open some smelling salts, and instantly, the boxer is awakened from his stupor! The shock and awe of ammonia crystals on the boxer’s nose and breathing passages causes him to wake up and be ready for action again.

For the crowds following Jesus, they were in a daze of sorts too. They were mesmerized by the miracles and teachings Jesus did as He walked among them. They hung out waiting for the next amazing thing Jesus would say or do. But lost on them was the real purpose of His presence among them. However, their lives were not being transformed. They were still, at best, only partially following Him as they remained grounded in their old ways.

Turn to Jesus’ words in Luke, the gospel we’ve been following of late. In the past couple of weeks, we’ve heard Jesus’ words, **(Luke 12:51)** *“Did you think I came to give peace on earth? No, but rather division.”* He comes to separate people from anyone, including family and friends, who might try to lead them away from Him and the truth of His Word. Then He said, **(Luke 13:24)** *“Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many will seek to enter and will not be able.”* He warns us we can’t continue to cling to our old worldly baggage if we truly desire to enter the kingdom of heaven. Then, just before His encounter with the crowds today, He tells a parable about a man who invites his friends to a great banquet. However, focused on their property, business pursuits, and family, they reject his invitation. The people following Jesus on His journey to Jerusalem had heard these things from Him, yet they still remained grounded in

their old ways. They needed a wakeup call ... a shock to their systems! So, Jesus uses the shock and awe of some extremely strong language to wake them up ... to bring them to their senses.

In a world where devotion to family ties was important ... especially the family tie to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob through whom most Israelites claimed salvation ... Jesus' words would've been like smelling salts to a dazed and confused boxer ... they would've gotten their attention. (Luke 14:26) *"If anyone comes to me and does not HATE his own father and mother and wife and children and brother and sister, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."* Yes, Jesus, the same Son of God who also said *"Love your enemy as yourself ... Love your neighbor"* says, *"You need to hate your family to be my disciple."*

The word translated as "hate" is "μισέω (miseo)" ... which can mean "hate" in the sense we generally understand today. But, to ears accustomed to Hebrew, it can also mean "loving less than." Jesus tells the crowds, *"If you want to follow me, really follow me, you need to put everything in your life second to me. You must even love your family and yourself less than me. If you're not willing to do that, you can't possibly be my disciple."* For a crowd of people holding firmly to their familial relationship to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob through their own fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, and children for salvation, this was a "divine smelling salt" that should've gotten their attention ... waking them from their spiritual daze.

Francis Schaeffer, a noted 20th century pastor and theologian, raised in a non-Christian home felt called at a young age to become a pastor ... against his dad's wishes. As the story goes, he was terrified to tell his dad his plans so he went into the basement to pray. As he prayed, *"God, please show me the way to go,"* he decided to flip a coin. He said, *"If it's heads, I'll go in spite of my dad's desires."* It was heads. In fear, both toward God and his dad, Francis said, *"God be patient with me. If it's tails this time, I'll go."* Tails. One last time, he said, *"Once more God, if*

it's heads, I'll go.” Heads. Inspired by the signs Francis interpreted as answers to his prayer, he went to his dad saying, *“I must follow the Lord and His will.”* His dad was angry and walked out on him, slamming the door. This story is an example of what Jesus meant by “hating family.” Francis recognized God’s call was opposed to his own dad’s desires. He also recognized that he must love his own dad less than Jesus. The will of God must come before even family when family will runs counter to God’s. Francis rejected his family, hating them to follow Jesus.

Many of us face similar circumstances ... our spouses, parents, children, brothers and sisters who have either fallen away from the faith, or never lived a life of faith to begin with. We’re torn between our families and God. We want to show that we love our families by agreeing with them ... or at least not fighting with them. We want to maintain relations with them so we bow to their wishes ... their desires ... we put them first ahead of God. However, when this happens, we become divided by our compromises ... which leads to a slippery slope ... where first our family takes priority over God ... then we begin laying down our crosses as we raise the priority of personal pleasure and comfort in our lives. Finally, we add to that a single-minded emphasis on our possessions. As family, pleasure and comfort, and possessions take priority ... they become the gods we serve ahead of the one true God ... Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus warns us, **(Luke 14:26)** *“If anyone comes to me and does not HATE his own father and mother and wife and children and brother and sister, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.”*

To understand this very difficult teaching, we must wrestle with Jesus’ Words ... looking at all of His Word to gain understanding. Doing so, we see Jesus isn’t calling us to display vitriol, animosity, or loathing anger ... the more familiar definition of “hate” ... toward our parents, spouses, children, or siblings. Because doing this would violate His own commandments to “honor our father and mother” and “not murder.” Looking at the entirety of God’s Word, we see

that at the same time, He calls us to “hate” our family ... He also calls us to show them “agape love” ... the same sacrificial love Jesus has given to us by suffering and dying to rescue us from our sins. By our devotion to Jesus above all things ... by “hating” our families in this way ... we actually show them the agape love of Christ by gently, lovingly proclaiming His Word ... first, the law which shows the sin in our lives which God truly hates in the way we usually understand this word ... and then the gospel which shows God’s love for us in His desire to save us from the effects of sin and death which separate us from Him through His only Son, Jesus Christ.

The crowds were following Jesus to Jerusalem ... the city where He would take up His own cross. Most in the crowds were, like many among us today, at best, casual disciples of Christ ... picking and choosing the parts they liked, while ignoring or explaining away the rest they didn’t like. They liked the miracles and gifts ... they didn’t like the talk of repenting and suffering and death ... picking up one’s cross to follow Him. But Jesus requires His disciples to have more than a casual relationship with Him. He requires His disciples to have a committed relationship with Him ... as committed to Him as He was to them. Jesus commitment to His Father’s mission to save His creation was full and complete as He carried the cross of our sins to the top of Calvary. There He committed everything ... His very life ... in a gruesome, painful, death at the hands of the people who hated Him. But Jesus was all in – giving his very last drop of blood and very last breath of life as payment for the sins of all mankind. Then, rising from the dead to new life, Jesus defeated the power of death over all who believe in Him.

In faith, Francis Schaeffer walked away from his dad toward his Father in heaven. In “hating” his own dad, though, he also showed his dad the love of Christ through his vocation as his son. This moment was like a “divine smelling salt” for Francis’ dad. Many years later, his dad eventually joined Francis in his new family as he too became a disciple of Jesus. Francis

believes that the moment he told his dad, *“I must follow the Lord,”* walking away from his dad toward his Father, was the moment his dad began his journey toward the Lord too.

In baptism, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we too have begun our journey as disciples of Christ. A disciple is *“a person who is constantly learning from someone by spending time with them.”* Being Jesus’ disciple means being on a lifetime journey of learning with Him – a journey is fraught with challenges, which is why Jesus warns all who contemplate it, **(Luke 14:27, 33)** *“Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple ... any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.”* Jesus isn’t asking us to abandon our families, martyr ourselves, or literally give away all we have to be His disciples. What He is telling us is, *“In faith, in response to my love for you, you must be willing to love me more than anyone or anything else! Live your life in accord with my Word and my will as a living sacrifice to me and to others.”* And we learn what that will is, throughout a life spent with Jesus ... hearing Him in His Word as we regularly study it; as we come into His presence through regular prayer and worship. In this time, He reveals the things we need to renounce ... bit by bit, we learn. Bit by bit, we grow. Bit by bit Jesus helps us to bear our crosses. And when we sin – dropping our crosses, refusing to release our hold on earthly family and friends, pleasures and comforts, or possessions, the Holy Spirit leads us away from “death and evil” ... He draws us to “life and good” – causing us to repent and confess our sins ... and receive God’s forgiveness. He renews our strength to continue our journey into the Promised Land, the eternal kingdom of heaven – dwelling in peace with God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

James Kent