

Who is our “We”?

Luke 14: 25-33

Now large crowds were traveling with him; and he turned and said to them, “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. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. 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? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ 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? If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

We have a common thought in our society that, “When it comes to family, family comes first.” Family is important we say. When the children are young, we set aside family date nights to cultivate the value of spending time together. Some of us have picked up our lives and moved just to be closer to the family. Others selflessly become a caregiver for a family member. Even if we don’t feel close to our family, there is still a sense of obligation to be there for them. Family is what is most important, society says. So, what do we do with Jesus’ words: “Whoever comes to me and does not *hate* father and mother, spouse, children, siblings, and yes, even life itself cannot be my disciple!” Who among us could qualify? Especially in a society which believes, “When it comes to family, family comes...”

Before we entirely tune Jesus out, let’s take a field trip back to the 1st century. In Jesus’s time, family not only came first, but it was the family that provided financial and social stability—food, housing, education, health care, jobs, etc. Families were self-sustaining economic units. Sort of like the stories from our parents or grandparents’ days about life on the farm. They were responsible not only for one another’s economic well-being, but each other’s social well-being as well. If one member of the extended household did something shameful—say a second cousin sowed wild oats—the entire family’s identity was impacted. If someone did something honorable, it lifted up the entire family name. So when Jesus says what he says, it flies in the face of everything a 1st century Jew found to be true. His audience is thinking: we don’t hate father and mother, the 5th commandment tells us we are to honor them. We don’t hate our children, we are to mold them into good God-fearing citizens. Family is the nucleus of their existence. It

turns out Jesus's words are even more offensive to his audience than they are to our ears today!

So let's unpack what Jesus is really doing? He is not saying we are to spread hate throughout our households. He's challenging our understanding that life is about me and my family's needs first to the exclusion of others! He's telling us *we cannot be a disciple if we only feel responsible for our own people*. And we all have them. We've watched tribalism play out politically over the last couple of years. In 2016 many of us held our noses as we voted for the candidate we felt would be in ours and our tribe's best interest forgetting our decisions have consequences for others. Coal miners voted based on who they thought would be best for their families, as did those who work three part-time jobs to put food on the table for theirs. Jesus challenges who our people really are and when we lose sight of each other's needs, we lose sight of the kingdom of God.

There is a rabbinic parable about a ship sailing across the waters. In the ship there are many cabins and passengers. One of the occupants on the bottom level takes a shovel and begins to dig a hole right there in the middle of the cabin floor. Sure enough, the ship begins to fill up with water and sink. When the other passengers realize what is happening, they ask the man who dug the hole, "What are you doing?!" The man looks at them and says, "It's my cabin, I paid for it!" Only focusing on my cabin—when my own needs take over—we lose our sense of who "we" are. More, we lose the entire ship. We cannot be disciples, says Jesus, if our sense of commitment only extends to our people. We cannot be disciples if we are clinging to an ideology, or an allegiance, or yes, even a nationalism for the sake of our own security, privilege and stability. We cannot be a people who follows a radical homeless man when we subscribe to a have-your-cake-and-eat-it-too faith that supports a me first, my family first, my people first, my country first mentality. It is lethal, dangerous and anti-gospel.

But here's a surprise: Jesus gives us an out! Jesus knows it is hard. He knows for many of us our "we" is not as expansive as his is. He knows carrying the cross for the sake of "we" is not everyone's cup of tea. Which is why he tells us to take inventory about whether or not we are serious about following him. How far are we willing to go? Because if we say yes, we will be relinquishing the fantasy that, "It is my cabin, I paid for it." If we say yes, we will begin to expand our understanding of "we" whether we want to or not. Some of us are going over to Dellabrook and worshiping with them once a month trying to expand the "we." Some are trying to expand the "we" by committing to the Stranger to Neighbor Event next Sunday—there's room. At the end of the month our Session is sharing a meal with the Transgender Support Group—our leaders are trying to expand the "we." What are we willing to do? Jesus asks.

On the radio there was a story about a man who went into Costco and bought all the generators, all the air beds; he cleared out the bottled water aisle and filled flatbeds with canned goods. After his bill exceeded \$50,000, someone asked him what this was for. He said it was for the people in the Bahamas after Hurricane Dorian squatted on the islands. "Do you have family there?" someone inquired. "No," the man said, "But I have responsibility." How far do we go? Take inventory, says Jesus. Because when we assume responsibility for each other, there will certainly be an inconvenience to our life and a cost to our privileges. There may even be a cross.

Malcolm X once said, "When 'I' is replaced with 'we' illness becomes wellness." Who is our I? How far are we willing to go for the sake of expanding the "we"? That is a question every disciple must answer, before we lose the entire ship.