

Making a Home

Matthew 10: 37-42

“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, and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and whoever welcomes a just person in the name of a just person will receive the reward of the righteous, and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.”

When we were walking in Pride last week there were a lot of great t-shirts in the crowd. One read, “I’m the rainbow sheep of the family.” Another said, “I like my whiskey straight, but I can take my friends either way!” There were a lot of wonderful people dressed in wonderful ways. But the t-shirt that made my heart sing the most was a shirt that had a single word on it. It simply said, “worthy.”

*Hold on to me as we go
As we roll down this unfamiliar road
And although this wave (wave) is stringing us along
Just know you're not alone
'Cause I'm gonna make this place your home*

Jesus uses the word “worthy” a lot in this passage, and it is a bit scary the way he seems to use it. I mean, seriously dude? “Whoever loves their father or mother; or whoever loves their child more than me is not worthy. Whoever doesn’t take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me.” He drops the “not worthy” statement three times. And as a result, this passage has tragically been used to scare parents into excluding their children who come out to them. Or some have not lived as they truly are all because *they think* Jesus is telling them that they have to choose between accepting themselves or a loved one, or being worthy of Jesus. As if there isn’t enough shame in our world already, Jesus’ words have caused so much pain and torment. But is anyone who would give us this kind of ultimatum, someone worth listening to? Probably not. So what is Jesus really saying?

You see, in the ancient world the family dictated everything. If someone did something that the rest of society might not approve of it brought shame upon the entire family. The family was someone’s central identity and responsibility. So if someone left the family to, let’s just say, follow some Jesus fellow who went into forbidden territories, broke sacred laws, and stood up for those who the rest of society had already written off—rumors would start flying and it would bring embarrassment and shame to their family, right?

So what Jesus is saying is that if we are going to follow him, it's not going to be an easy road. People are going to start to disagree with us for challenging unjust systems and standing up for other people's humanity. People closest to us might judge us for the wrong reasons. And even though we might feel obligated to the people we care about, we have to stay true to who we are and what we are called to do. Jesus isn't telling the disciples they need to reject their families. He is telling them they need to reject choosing the old familial roles and social obligations in order to stay kosher and please them. Because the cost could be losing themselves and their mission of helping to transform the world into a kinder and more just and loving place.

*Settle down, it'll all be clear
Don't pay no mind to the demons
They fill you with fear
The trouble, it might drag you down
If you get lost, you can always be found
Just know you're not alone*

'Cause I'm gonna make this place your home

But listen to what Jesus jumps to next. He says we are to be a welcoming people. Now one thing is certain: this church has got that one in the bag! We are Jedi knights at hospitality. I've personally known preachers who have used this church as a sermon illustration when describing a church who welcomes people like God does! But did you hear how Jesus begins these instructions: he says if we are to be a welcoming people, we need to first be welcomed by people. Which means we have to put ourselves in positions of being welcomed, and not just welcoming people by waiting for them to come to us. Now is it just me or is it far easier to welcome someone then it is to be welcomed by them?

I remember hearing a story about a friend who went with a group on a mission trip to Nairobi, Kenya. What surprised them the most was how they had to adjust to receiving the welcome of the villagers they were sent to help. When they walked through the doors, the locals waited on them hand and foot. They fed them abundantly and acted as if Jesus himself strolled into the room. "Whoever welcomes you, welcomes me," says Jesus. My friend said, "I thought we were there to help them, to serve them, to reach them. But then I realized: how are we going to reach them if we don't allow ourselves to be reached by them." You see, Jesus is sure to remind us that we are not being sent out to only "make a difference" (then it's about us...and it can't be about us because the mission is always a two-way street). We are sent to the margins, not to make a difference, but to be made different by the poor and the powerless and the voiceless. We allow those whose dignity has been denied, to alter our heart and we receive with grace the welcome of those whose burdens are more than they can bear. We make a home not only by welcoming others into our lives, but by allowing others to welcome us into theirs.

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Ooh, ooh-ooh, ooh-ooh-ooh, ooh-ooh-ooh
Ah, ah-ah, ah-ah

So maybe you have a story of welcome—welcoming someone or being surprised by someone else’s welcome. For me, it’s why walking in Pride was so cool this year. I thought we were walking to show our support for them, and what ended up happening was we were showered with their support. It’s why doing relational meetings with other churches is so important. Because it turns out that if we are going to help transform the world, we are going to have to allow the people we are sharing good news with to transform us as well. It is the reward of the faithful and how we make a new home. A house for all. Where all are worthy and welcome. And where there is more than enough room for us to be welcomed into the life of the gospel together.

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Ah, ah-ah, ah-ah