**Sermon Draft**

**Text: Luke 14:25–33**

**Sermon: “Family”**

When we follow Jesus, we join a family. This changes everything especially us. Remember the bracelet WWJD? What would Jesus do? How would Jesus handle such intense personal commitments and family commitments? How would he handle where our families have gone in the world today?

In the Gospel we see Jesus, full of grace and truth, daring enough to confront adults who had come to love intensely their family members. He does it by the use of a hyperbole. ***“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father or mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple”*** (Luke 14:26).

C. S. Lewis says in his book The Four Loves it is not that we don’t love enough, it is that we love too much. In fact, this entire book could serve as a commentary on this passage from Luke 14.

He cites St. Augustine (Confessions IV, 10) when Augustine describes the desolation into which the death of his friend Nebridius plunged him.

Augustine says this is what comes of giving one’s heart to anything but God. All human beings pass away. Do not let your happiness depend on something you may lose.

Already in the Old Testament, God was refining his people’s devotion to him by calling into question their love for their family members.

Long before Jesus came from the high and holy throne of God to live among us as a loving servant, God challenged Abraham, the man promised to be the father of many nations, to take his long-awaited and much-loved son Isaac and sacrifice him. Have you ever wondered what Abraham thought as he and his entourage made their way up the very slopes to the mountain on which Jesus would someday be crucified. I have looked for details in the story that would help answer my curiosity. But the account in Genesis 22 is concise and direct.

***“Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, [and boy, how Abraham must have “loved” Isaac] and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.”***

Like at the calling of Gideon the judge or of Moses the Lawgiver, I would anticipate at this point that there would be some questioning on Abraham’s part. But there isn’t. The next verse simply says, ***“Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey.”***

Abraham takes two servants and travels for three days, and when they reach the right place, Abraham says, ***“Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.”*** What an odd form of worship Abraham had in mind, a rite of worship that entailed the sacrifice of his son! But it is the type of worship God and Jesus in the Gospel are looking for from us. He wants a worship of him that has stripped away all other loves we have.

If love is to be a blessing, not a misery, it must be for God, who will never pass away. He wants from us a worship of him that is single-minded in purpose, never loving anything or anyone above him, for the love of another, including family members, can destroy us.

The story of Abraham attempting to sacrifice Isaac comes as a preparation for the challenge Jesus sets forth to the crowd that listened to him in the Gospel for this weekend. Although Abraham did leave his idols (Joshua 24) and his idol-worshiping family members in the city of Ur when God bid him go to the Promised Land, he was not without his moments of loving his own plan above God’s. Remember, he passed off his beautiful wife Sarah as his sister when he encountered the mighty Pharaoh of Egypt (Genesis 12). Remember how he took Hagar as his substitute wife when he and Sarah felt that God’s promise of a descendant would not be fulfilled. But now, after the promised son had come and after he had been through many of life’s trials, Abraham responded to God’s testings in a mature, faith-filled manner.

The text simply says, ***“Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey”*** (Genesis 22:3). It is the reason the Book of Romans states, ***“Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness”*** (Romans 4:3). Abraham didn’t doubt God’s promise, he told the servants to wait he said we will return.

At the time of God’s testing of him, he was so focused on God that he denied his own selfish need to be a father. During the early morning hours when he saddled up his donkey, he showed that his love of God was above all else in his life, even his love of his only son. This was his moment of truth, and it was counted to him as righteousness.

During this season of Pentecost, in which we are schooled in the life of Christ, Jesus raises the standards of discipleship. The word that catches our attention is the word hate. It is difficult to use this word without evoking an emotional response. We can use the words dislike or unfavorably disposed, but hate is an emotionally charged word.

It becomes even more so because it seems to be the opposite of some of Jesus’ other statements, ***“But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you: Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. . . . If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? . . . But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back”*** (Luke 6:27).

Again, C. S. Lewis is helpful.

But how are we to understand the word hate? That Love Himself should be commanding what we ordinarily mean by hatred—commanding us to cherish resentment, to gloat over another’s misery, to delight in injuring him—is almost a contradiction in terms. I think what our Lord means is to hate is to reject, to set one’s face against, to make no concessions to . . . the suggestions of the Devil.

The original Greek word for hate doesn’t soften the English. Enemies are enemies because, for whatever reason, a mood of hate exists between the two parties. We may say, “This will not preach,” especially in a day when the divorce rate is high, when more and more family members live at a distance from each other, and many don’t want to have anything to do with each other. Should we not love more? Are we not our brother’s (sister’s, mother’s, father’s) keeper (Genesis 4:9)? The world needs more love and that love begins and ends with Christ.

Jesus is telling us, “Set your priorities. Organize your life to include my love for you.” It is too bad none of us were there when he said these words, because I believe that if we had heard him speak, we would have heard a deep tone of compassion in his voice, perhaps even a pleading for us to get our priorities straight, for he, Jesus, is the personification of God’s covenantal compassion for his people. He is filled with this love for us and is intent on flooding all aspects of our lives with it.

Family is all about our relationship with our heavenly Father who loves us so much He sent His only Son to redeem and reconcile us to Himself. Family begins and ends with Christ.

Amen