

Passion

Year C

Season of Pentecost

Sunday Between September 4 and September 10 Inclusive

September 5, 2010, Fifteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Read the Bible passage: [Luke 14:25-33](#), The Message; or [Luke 14:25-33](#), The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

Faith-provoking, historical insights into the lesson by [David Ewart](#), [Luke 14:25-33](#).

Click here: [George Hermanson's sermon](#), for an easy to print or email Adobe PDF version of this sermon.

The Rev. Dr. George Hermanson

Note: The following sermon was preached on September 9, 2007 at Edwards (Knox) United Church.

Astonishing words of Jesus. Hate your family. Hate your mother. Hate your father. Hate your children. Not friendly words in a family centered culture. What is going on? Jesus goes on to say "If you don't say good-bye to everything that belongs to you, you're no disciple of mine."

These are not the words you would have as the main article in a parenting magazine. What to make of them? They were also tough words for Luke. The early community struggled with them, so Luke turns them into advice about planning. Now that does resonate with us for we know planning for the future is crucial - wait till next January and February and all those ads for RRSPs. It works with us because urban planning, rural planning, church planning and personal planning are the currency of our day.

Still those words hang there despite all of our rationalizations - even the good ones. Pretty radical stuff.

Here is a time when knowledge of the biblical times helps. And we examine the text contextually we can see its applications to our situation. Kinship and tribal obligations were the first demand on an individual. The highest ethical demand was care of those like you, who belonged to your family, your clan. In those times there were some who were left out, had no clan or kin to care for them, speak for them, protect them. The circle had been drawn too narrowly. Many fell outside.

And the obligation was to only care for those who belong within the circle of likeness. Can you hear that happening today?

When one is paying attention to the events around us, listening to the experiences of others, while listening to the texts, the texts become clearer. This was very much the case for me this week.

George Hermanson

May the Lure be with you

On Thursday I was sitting in a booth at the Renfrew Fair, on behalf of friend who is running in the coming provincial election. Another friend came by and we talked. Later he returned and the conversation turned to immigration - he said we were letting too many people with different values into Canada. He had a great passion on the issue, and it was clear that those who were deserving to become Canadians were like him and us - white and European stock.

The person with me in the booth, an active member of a church, turned to me and asked - "is he a Christian?" I said "look he is working in booth for that church." Earlier he had gone on about his grandson and how he raised him, pride about his daughter and son-in-law who attended a church different from his. So given the standards of our time, he was a family man, active in his church, and cared for those around him - yet this blind spot.

Jesus had instituted a radical ethic. His community was the community wider than what one could see. He said, as we have talked about, that our ultimate trust and loyalty should be in the compassion of God. So his planning strategy was based on this trust. He moved into the world, preaching that gospel and healing all who needed it. And there was no back up plan and no support system. Depend on God and the generosity of strangers. he said. Carry no purse. Attend to the needs that are in front of you - the needs larger than your kin.

He challenged the way the world was organized. He said there was a higher value than neighbour - the enemy. He said there was a higher value than kinship or family - the common good. It appealed those who had no family. It appealed to those who wanted to escape the negativity of xenophobia (fear of the stranger).

Suzanne had family members visiting this week. The conversations turned to what was the meaning of the texts and the common good. I heard the stories of some people who were passionate about the care of those at the edge of society. The commonality was their Christian faith. It had sent them into novel situations - several going north to teach in isolated communities and how difficult it was.

Now a connecting image was the person with me in the booth had also pulled up stakes and went north without any back up plans. What helped all of them hang in was this image of Jesus who expanded the boundaries of who is in and who we should care for - to transcend family responsibilities for a greater good. An unexpected outcome was that their families actual grew from this experience and were now those who risked for the common good. This has been true of children of activists - they too have a wider vision of the common good. But from our societies perspective they were not honoring the idea of family comes first.

I heard one dramatic story of helping a person who had been oppressed by kinship values. To save her they brought the person south. Now it is true the better way would have been to expand and change the tribal values, but sometimes it is only the one that we can help. And this was the case.

This is a tricky situation because when we help someone move beyond their kin it does call that value system into question. Now that kinship system may have been damaged by our intrusion into it, and our imperialistic tendencies. However, that is the reality in which we must act. So despite the objections, one person was

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moved into a new reality. The outcome is still in process and those who caused the shift know they are tied for the long run in the healing of that individual.

Sitting at the fair I saw many illustrations of passion - from organic farmers to raising funds for the hospice, or cancer to isolationists - those who wanted their own good attended to rather than the common good. What was attractive about the organic farmers is their care for the earth and those around us. They had a calmness and a vitality that was infectious, as opposed to those isolationists who were angry and hostile as they tried to convince others about their cause. It seemed to me that vision of the common good actually does expand the sense of hospitality which carries over to ones personal sense of self - an expansive and generous way of being.

In a real sense that makes a difference to our intimate relationships. Our fear driven culture creates controlling attitudes. When we draw our circle narrowly those within it feel oppressive and the sense of being controlled. It comes out in the language "we do this for you own good." When the circle is wide it creates a healthy sense of community and self.

This also has implications for the wider community. Democracy only works when we have a sense of inclusion. The greatest threat to our communal well being is the imposition of self interest or the interests of my group or my faith as the standard of the meaning of community or democracy. We cannot impose democracy, it must grow from within and based on the expansion of who is part of the world. In Jesus' vision of God, it is the whole of creation that is a delight in God's eyes and we want to make that our passion.

In October we will be gathering as this church community to ask what is our passion? Much has been accomplished and so what is next? I want you to think about your passion for this community. Where do we want to go? The health of a church is not strategic planning but spiritual passion and care of the common good. There is no one plan. However, when a community sits down together and shares their passion and vision for this world we can get some provisional directions. We find our core passion which will always being adapted to changing circumstances. So for the next month pray and ask what is my passion for this church? Out of our individual passions we will find our passion for our community and world. So we will sit down together and share - Open to surprise from what will emerge from our passions.

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