

Trinity 12 2025

[Baptism of Frankie Clack]

Luke 14.25-33

There are some things that we probably rather Jesus *didn't* say, and this ranks quite high among them [especially at a baptism!]:

*Whoever comes to me and does not hate
father and mother, wife and children,
brothers and sisters, yes even life itself,
cannot be my disciple.*

When encountering such a passage, our first instinct is that he cannot possibly be saying what it sounds like he's saying. There's been some kind of mistake. Perhaps it is a mistake of translation, as indeed some claim, but unpersuasively.

The Greek verb μῑσέω (mīséō) means "to hate"; and we find it in such English words as "misogyny" and "misanthrope". In the Gospels themselves, the word is contrasted with love as its very opposite (Matt. 5.43). Despite this, some interpreters try to argue that Luke is getting at prioritisation, with Jesus saying that his disciples must love him more than they love their families,

but not that they must hate their families, or otherwise be in enmity with them. Except that there is a perfectly sensible Greek way to say that, which Luke would've been more than competent enough to know.

As it happens, St Matthew's Gospel's version of this saying employs that kind of language, So Luke is deliberately sharpening the rhetoric here. It's possible that Matthew's version is more accurate than Luke's, closer to what Jesus actually said; but, there are no historical or textual grounds for supposing so; and Matthew's version does not get us off the hook anyway, when read in context.

Right before this passage, that gospel includes another, starker, saying, that Jesus has come "to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother...and one's foes will be members of one's own household". Luke's gospel also contains this saying, but he places it elsewhere. It is difficult to escape from the plain meaning of our gospel text this morning.

And yet, it *must* be hyperbole. It must be hyperbole because it is, if understood flatly, in contradiction with other teachings of Jesus, and

especially that startling command to love our enemies, which we also find in both Matthew and Luke. And so, even if familial estrangement and enmity is the result of the life of faith, this cannot come with hatred, at least not from the side of Christians.

That is the imagined scenario, of course: that a person's choice to follow Jesus might cause upset to family and friends, and strife between the new convert and the unconverted kith and kin. Christianity is now a perfectly respectable and venerable religious tradition. People bring their children here to be baptised; and their friends and family come to celebrate this. But back then, it was risky business to become a Christian: to get baptised, to come to church. There have been times when these were done in secret; and even now, there are places where it's not safe, and certainly not easy or convenient to be a Christian. And our family and friends may well oppose us for it, whether out of love and concern for our well-being or our of anger and hatred of the faith.

There is, of course, nothing *fun* about living in a time and place where our religious decisions are subject to persecution and violence, where they are cause for estrangement between family members. All the same, there is some redemption of the fact that such times and places exist, in that they remind us of how valuable our faith is, and what sort of life it calls us to.

The gospel, this passage is saying, is so valuable to us as to be worth more than our dearest and closest relations and friends: and that, if it ever came to it, it would be right to leave them to follow Jesus. This is, of course, exactly what the earliest disciples of Jesus did, who were called from their fishing nets and desk jobs and, yes, their families, to live the uncertain and precarious life of itinerant preachers. According to legend, almost all of them ended up violently dead.

And this raises the obvious question of what this gospel is, that makes it so unspeakably precious to be worth more than our most intimate human relationships. Our passage this morning gives us a clue here too, in its talk of

hatred of those whom we would otherwise love: indeed, those whom, we might say, we have been given by God to love. The gospel is the assertion that there is something that turns such love into hatred, or more accurately, that makes what we know as love seem like hatred, not by tricking or deluding us, but by revealing to us a love so great, so profound, so intense, that, if only we could feel its full force, it would make finite, natural, human loving seem a pale imitation of the real thing.

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Perhaps that goes too far. It is not that the love we know—that between lovers, between parents and children, between friends—is somehow illegitimate, somehow false. No, that's not what I'm trying to say, what the Christian tradition asserts.

Rather, what it insists upon is that all that love—that genuine love that husbands have for their wives and wives for their husbands; that parents have for their children and children for their parents—(all that love) comes from somewhere, has a source that is not just

biological or cultural, but is much deeper than that, is a part of the fabric of reality itself, says something profoundly true about what it means to exist, which—for Christians—is to be created. And to be created is, in Christian terms, to be loved into being, as indeed human children are in the best of cases [as indeed, Frankie is]. In the best of cases, when children are loved into being, parents are participating in something divine: the act of creating that goes beyond mere manufacturing, but which makes the created thing worth much more, unspeakably more, than the sum of its parts.

And even in the worst of cases, when children are born well outside of the context of anything recognisable as love, they are nevertheless loved into being by God who, besides being the first of all lovers is also the lover of last resort, whose love remains faithful in its absolute infinity regardless of what the human circumstances are.

This, then, is the gospel that is so incomparably precious: that there is a love that is better than all other love, even our own most cherished expressions and experiences thereof;

from which those expressions and experiences ultimately come, and which—if and when they fail—remains true; and to which those expressions and experiences ultimately point, they being clues, messengers, evangelists of that love that belongs properly to God, being who God is, but which God has given to us to be our own.

[This, then, is what baptism is. The plunging of a beloved child—of Chantel and Josh but even before and above that, of God—[the plunging of this child, Franklin] into absolute and infinite love, which is to acknowledge the truth that he was and is loved into being, and to bless his life that he may live this life of love, for his own sake, and even for the sake of the whole world.]