

Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> September 2025, Trinity 12. BCP Benefice Holy Communion Stonegrave.

*“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.”*

Very hard words on first reading, as our recent Sunday Gospel passages have been. My recent sermon spoke about Jesus saying He was bringing division and not peace. Today he is saying hate your family, even life itself, that we must be willing to give up all our possessions, or we cannot be his disciple.

Wouldn't it be nice to come today and simply be *thanked* for being here? Rather than in the garden, or the golf course, or just sitting in our lounge with a cup of coffee or glass of sherry? You might even feel that you are hating being here! But we are here, not to be thanked, but to be thankful, to worship, to give completely of ourselves and everything in our lives. We are here to follow Jesus, learn from him, and grow in what it means to be his disciple.

Today's gospel reading starts by telling us that *“large crowds were traveling with Jesus.”* The people have made the choice to *travel* with Jesus, but have they made the choice to *follow him*? Have you?

Jesus didn't give up his divinity and come to earth to have people simply to travel with him and carry on in the same way with their lives, He came to invite people to change their lives and to follow him, to 'repent' and be transformed. That isn't always easy because it means giving up being in control and having new priorities. Jesus invites the crowds to make a choice - to travel with him, until they get bored or frustrated or disappointed; or follow him, all the way to the cross and the tomb. Which will it be? It is a life-changing decision, and Jesus knows it. He wants to make sure that those who follow him have considered that being his follower is not something we can do just when we want to or feel like it. It means being completely in, or out, and so, for the crowds traveling with Jesus, and for you and I, it's time to decide. Do they want to travel with him, or do they want to follow him? That is the same question for

us today and comes to us repeatedly in our lives. Why are here, in church today? Because we want to travel with Jesus or are we here because we have made the choice to take up our cross and follow him? If we are ready to follow him, then consequently, He must come first and nothing else can be more important to us than Jesus, not our families or our possessions, or even our very lives.

To emphasize that, Jesus says that to follow him we must 'hate' our father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters. The word Jesus uses for *hate* here, in Greek, is *miseo*, which is not something emotional as we might interpret it. When we hate it is a feeling; we hate spiders, or pop music, or cleaning or beetroot, or football or the vicar! What it means when Jesus speaks of hate is that to hate something is to put that something first instead of Him. It is about priorities and Jesus is saying He must come first and everything else must be secondary. Jesus knew that there would always be times when people would be tempted to make family or possessions first, above everything else, even God. When that happens, family can become toxic, relationships can turn sour, possessions can rule our lives. Jesus is simply reminding us that for our lives to be truly fulfilled, He must come first, because in all things when Jesus is first, our families, our relationships, our possessions, everything is enhanced beyond our imagination because they are not based on our own strength or efforts. He brings life and life in its fullness; He brings transformation and transfiguration and above all He brings God's love into everything in our lives, if we allow it, if we let go, even of our most precious possessions, our families, our possessions, even our own lives and give them freely to Him. Then all those things become far more precious because they are in God's hands and in His love.

Jesus doesn't mean to send us away from him with these teachings, but He invites us not to just travel with Him keeping control of our lives and everything in them, but to follow him because He loves us. If we allow, He will lead the way; and He will always be with us. His very last promise to us, before He returned to Heaven, was to always be with us, to the end of the age. When we follow Him, He is with us, helping us to live our lives for Him, forgiving us when

we fall short, picking us up when we fall, and inviting us to follow Him. Is that someone you want to put first in your life, and put everything else in this world, second?

Thanks be to God. Amen.