

Luke 14:25-35

Jesus is not very family friendly

Tim Anderson 28/5/17

It seems like the church the last defender
of what politicians call 'family values'.

Years ago the church tried to make the case
for waiting until you are married to live together.

Society has totally passed us by on that one.

I think committed Christians and committed members of other faiths
are the only ones left who do that now days.

Today the big family values items
are same sex marriage and gender confusion.

The church is out there arguing
that same sex marriage damages children and families.

When David van Gend wrote this book,

"Stealing from a Child",

my colleague at Cranbourne, David Powys,
bought a whole box for his church.

It's the church who has been arguing most strongly
that if children are confused about their gender,
then the medicos should treat the confusion
not give them surgery to make the confusion permanent.

Why do we do such things?

Is it about intolerance of people who are different?

Not at all.

It's about valuing the family.

Believing that a family with a mum dad and kids
is the way that God has designed for children to be brought up.

And we are letting our society come to grief if we say nothing
while the community at large

moves in ways that are going to hurt a lot of people.

The church is family friendly.

Of course there are exceptions.

But the exceptions are not the ideal,

brought about by unfortunate circumstances,

not what we should be aiming for.
The church is family friendly.

But Jesus is not very family friendly.

"If anyone comes to me
and does not hate father and mother,
wife and children,
brothers and sisters -
yes even their own life -
such a person cannot be my disciple."

That doesn't sound very family friendly.

Doesn't it say in the ten commandments honour your father and mother?
Now Jesus says to hate them.

Well you don't have to be the sharpest tool in the shed
to work out that Jesus is using hyperbole.

That is colourful exaggeration to make a point.

Like it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle
than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.

It's hyperbole.

Camels can't go through needles.

And it's very hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.

But if Jesus just said, "It's very hard for the rich to enter the kingdom",
then no one would bat an eyelash.

He says it's easier for a camel to get through the eye of a needle
because that grips our attention.

It pulls us up short.

And we realise that here's something we need to pay attention to.

So pay attention,

"If anyone comes to me
and does not hate father and mother,
wife and children,
brothers and sisters -
yes even their own life -
such a person cannot be my disciple."

What is Jesus saying?

He's not saying that you actually have to hate your family members.
But don't stop there.

There's a trick we play on ourselves when we hear Jesus use hyperbole.
We only say what Jesus doesn't mean,
and we forget about what he does mean.

Here's what he does mean.

Following Jesus has to be so much more important to you
than your love for your family,
that by contrast, it's almost as if you hated them.

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I'm preaching at the commissioning
of the graduating CMS missionaries on Saturday week.

The reason I'm preaching
is because on lady from our Healesville Church
is one of the missionaries to be commissioned.

Let's call her Sally because she's going to a sensitive location.
Now Sally's sister contracted aggressive breast cancer 2 years ago.
Another sister has escaped from a domestic violence situation.
Sally would love to be there for her sisters.

She's very close to her sisters.

She loves her nieces and nephews.

Why does she want to leave her family
to serve Jesus in a sensitive location?

Couldn't she serve Jesus quite effectively
as a teacher in a Christian School in Melbourne?

That was what she was doing
before she undertook Bible College training.

But you see, the call of Jesus on Sally's life
is stronger than the call of her family.

She's prepared to leave it all behind,
when she's convinced that Jesus wants her somewhere else.
And in that sense,

Jesus is not very family friendly.
He is prepared to make the tough call,
that asks his disciples to put him in front of their family.

Let's bring it a bit closer to home.
Missionaries is a bit out there for most people,
because most of us are not going to be missionaries.
How many hours do you think Don Johnson
is spending on the opp shop at the moment?
Let me tell you, it's lots.
Is he doing that because he loves opp shops or Jesus?
It's because he loves Jesus.
He's like me.
Very happy to let his wife do the opp shopping.
But he will put lots of time into the church's opp shop,
because he's convinced that helps the body of Christ here.
But here's the family question.
Does Don have a wife?
Yes he does, her name is Ruth.
Does he have children?
Yes.
Grandchildren. Yes.
In saying Yes to the Opp shop,
is he in some sense saying no to his wife, children and grandchildren?
Yes he is.
The time he spends doing church stuff
he could be spending with his family.
By comparison to Jesus,
it looks like he hates his family.

Now sometimes following Jesus will mean loving your family.
Sometimes it will even mean doing something with your family
instead of a church thing.
I went to the men's Bible Study on Wednesday.
But I'm not going to do that often,
because Wednesday is my day off,

and I want to spend time with my wife.
More than I want to.
It's honours Jesus for me to spend time with my wife.
It just happened that she was on a conference this Wednesday.
Don will do the same thing.
He's going to have a holiday with his wife in June.
And he's going to hand his opp shop responsibilities to someone else.

So it calls for wisdom
when following Jesus means putting your family first
and when it means putting church first.
But in the eyes of the world,
it will always be a shock if you put Jesus in front of your family.
And that's what we are called to do.

What about building buildings and fighting wars?
What's that got to do with it?
The point is,
before you decide to follow Jesus,
work out if you are prepared to make the sacrifice.
We're going to be building a new building.
We'll get some money from insurance.
But for what I want we're going to need much more than that.
I'd like an opp shop with a large cafe area.
A cafe area that can be used mid week and after church.
I'd like the new building to join to our current church hall,
so you don't have to walk outside to get from one to the other.
I'd like a commercial kitchen.
I wouldn't say no to a church hall
that was a bit more robust for teen age boys.
But you know what,
we might not be able to afford all that I want.
Even if we take out a loan from the ADF.
So we need to calculate what we can afford with an architect,
before we start building.
No point getting half way through building the Taj Mahal

and then running out of money.

Jesus' point is that it's the same with following him.
There's no point getting half way through following Jesus.
And then working out that you hadn't calculated the cost.
Following Jesus is an all or nothing commitment.
Either you are in it with everything you've got.
Or you are not in it at all.
Don't start following Jesus
if you aren't prepared to follow him all the way.

Now Jesus is saying this to the crowds.
It seems like this is effectively calculated to drive the crowds away.
These crowds haven't decided
whether or not they are going to become disciples yet.
Why use hyperbole
to paint such a stark picture of the cost of being a disciple?
Couldn't Jesus paint it in slightly more appealing terms?

The point is that Jesus doesn't want disciples to give up
when the going gets tough.
He doesn't want that
because only disciples who stay the distance are true disciples.
And only true disciples receive the gift of eternal life.
Jesus tells us upfront what it's going to cost
because that way we'll be equipped to go the distance.

Well this ought to send a shudder of fear
through the church in rich western countries like Australia.
Because quite frankly we are not used to our faith costing us much.
You've all heard of the bombing in Manchester.
But just as shocking was the shooting in Egypt.
28 Egyptian Christians were pulled out of a buses yesterday.
They were on their way to a monastery to pray.
The terrorist shot them.
Including a couple of two year olds.

That's just the latest incident.

This year, there have been three church bombings
in the middle of Sunday services in Egypt.

If you are going to follow Jesus in Egypt,
you really need to think about the cost before you start.

It's not much good deciding to be a Christian,
and then wimping out because it's too dangerous.

But what about us?

What's the cost for us?

Well the cost for you is anything you would put in front of Jesus.

It could be a relationship that will lead you away from God.

It could be making an idol of your work so you have no time for God.

It could be the idol of financial security or financial success.

It could be living for holidays instead of living for Jesus.

And it could be your family.

"Anyone who comes to me and does not hate father and mother,
wife and children,

brothers and sisters ... cannot be my disciple."

How could family be an idol?

I worked that out

when my kids started getting birthday party invitations
for Sunday mornings.

It's just the accepted thing these days

that most parties will run on a Sunday morning.

"Oh Dad, it's only one Sunday."

Rubbish it's only one Sunday.

As soon as I've said yes to one,

I can't say no to the next one and the one after that.

How are my kids going to learn to put God first

if they never have to say no to something that actually feels like a cost?

Even now the older ones are teenagers.

It's "Dad there's a sleepover

with such and such a friend from MECS on a Saturday night.

It's a dear friend from MECS and I hardly ever get to see them now."

Fine. You can go to the sleepover,

if you go to church with them in the morning.
Otherwise forget it.
You see fun with friends might be an idol for my kids.
But pleasing my kids and making them happy
could easily become an idol for me.
It would be so easy to play for the approval of your children.
"You're such a great, Dad.
So chilled.
So understanding of my need to see my friends."
Nah. Forget about being chilled and understanding.
Teach your kids the cost of discipleship.
Then they can tell you in thirty years time that you were a good Dad.
When they are struggling to teach their kids the cost of discipleship.

Look at what Jesus says in verse 33.
"In the same way,
those of you who do not give up everything you have
cannot be my disciples."
Is Jesus really going to make you give up everything?
Well he won't make you give up everything exactly.
Only the things you really don't want to give up.
Why did Jesus tell the rich young ruler to give away his money?
Because money was the one thing
the rich young ruler couldn't bear to part with.
What's the one thing you can't bear to part with?
That will be what Jesus asks you to give up.
Why that?
Because that is what is an idol for you.
You might not be asked to give up everything,
but you have to be prepared to give up everything.

Salt is good,
but if it loses its saltiness,
how can it be made salty again?
It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile;
it is thrown out.

Have you ever seen salt that has lost its saltiness?

I didn't think so.

But in ancient times the salt was mixed with a fair bit of rock dust.

Their chemistry skills weren't quite as advanced.

So if you have salt mixed with rock dust,

and you got it wet,

and the salt dissolved and drained off.

And you basically just had rock dust left with a few skerrick of salt.

Or to the ancient mind, you had salt that had lost its saltiness.

What's it good for?

Nothing.

It's not salty enough to flavour your dinner.

But there's still too much salt to put it on the garden.

It would poison the soil.

And what's salt got to do with costly discipleship?

Christians are meant to be salt in world.

It's our willingness to say no to the things this world prizes
that make us distinct, salty.

A Christian person

who is no different from their non Christian neighbour

is not going to be doing much for the kingdom of God.

They are like salt that has lost its saltiness.

No longer distinct.

Just rock dust actually.

Not even fit for the compost bin.

About as useful as a chocolate teapot.

Jesus wants disciples who are willing to give up everything for him.

If that makes him not very family friendly,
then so be it.

I wonder what God wants you to give up

in order to be more faithful in following Jesus.

If you think of something,

let me know.

Because it would be very encouraging to hear about it.