

## Written Copy: Matthew 10:37-39 “Having Your Cake and Eating It Too”

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday @ Pentecost, Proper 8

Sunday, July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023

### Text: Matthew 10:37-39

<sup>37</sup> Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. <sup>38</sup> And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. <sup>39</sup> Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

### The text's intent

Warn the Church as it lives out its call to witness to Christ and the Gospel in our everyday lives that the result will not always be peace, but the division that comes from unbelieving hearts that reject the Gospel, reject Jesus as Lord, and reject us since we follow Him and find our identity only in Him. This division can hit as close to home as family. Those who make their relationship with the world more important than their faith relationship with Christ are not deserving of being His disciples, His Church. If we continue to live in this way it can mean forfeiting life with Christ now and for eternity. But when we pick up our cross, the suffering, opposition, and tribulation that comes with confessing Christ and His Gospel by living out a life of faith, we find the new life He desires to give us now that stretches all the way to eternity. He goes with us so that whoever welcomes us welcomes Him, and whoever denies our witness denies Him who we witness for. We go like prophets that share not our own word but the Word of the Lord, as righteous people made so by the Gospel we share, and as little ones who may seem to the world as insignificant. But any and all who use their gifts and talents for the ministry and mission of the Church are important to Jesus and will all share in the reward of life with Him now and eternal life to come.

### Focus Statement:

Jesus came to live in our world, not to conform to its standards, but to live opposed to it in perfect obedience with the Father. He paid the price for our living in opposition to the standards we are called to so that we are forgiven. His atoning sacrifice brought peace with God, and through that we can have peace with one another. His Spirit gives us the power and ability to live putting Christ first and forgive the opposition from the world and family. The forgiveness we have in Christ is the power to keep picking up our cross and follow Him through any and all opposition, forgiven for when we fail, and made worthy of the eternal reward to come.

### Function Statement:

#### Why it's important to know:

We want to live in the best of both worlds, Christian on Sundays and live like the world during the week. We don't want to face opposition and so will hide our faith. We sometimes choose ourselves and loved ones over Christ when it comes to who we serve with our time, talents, and treasures. We don't always want to pick up our cross and follow.

#### What the hearer should do as a result:

Seek the encouragement and strength the Spirit provides through the fellowship of the Church as we encourage one another in the midst of opposition, pray for one another, and work together according to our gifts to do the ministry of the Church.

### Subject Sentence: Real life is found in living and confessing Christ

## **Introduction: Having Your Cake and Eating it Too**

“You can’t have your cake and eat it too.” That’s a well-worn phrase that, when directed at you by someone else, may not exactly bring joy to your heart. We may hear it all the time, but what does it actually mean? It means wanting or desiring two different things, both of which you may see as being good for you but are usually incompatible with one another. In a very literal sense, if we are actually talking about cake, think about how sometimes in a banquet setting the dessert is already on the table set before you before the first course even comes. The cake you are supposed to have for dessert is set before you, so you have it. But if you eat it now, when the time comes for dessert, and everyone else is enjoying theirs, you’ll be sitting like a bump on a log enjoying nothing. You have your cake now, but when you eat it, it’s gone.

We don’t like that. We are Americans living in a country where we can buy whatever we desire most of the time (within reason). In our example with cake, you could eat that piece set before you before dinner, and then just order a second piece when dessert time rolls around, paying however much extra that would cost. Or you could take the piece sitting in front of the vacant spot at the table, or from someone who doesn’t want theirs. Or if you’re devious, you can grab the piece in front of the person that is too busy talking, or the one that has gone to the bar for another drink. Having your cake and eating it too might be possible in a temporal sense, but not in the spiritual sense.

Living as a believer in Christ in the midst of an unbelieving world is difficult. It can be even more difficult when they are members of your own family.

Growing up as a pre-teen I was a believer who read the Bible, prayed fervently, and tried hard to live a life that pleased God. I remember one summer spending a week up north at My Grandma’s place-my mother’s mother. She was an old farm girl. She was cynical about a lot of things: government, the younger generation, but especially concerning any and all religion. She saw me reading the Bible and started to ask me why I was wasting my time with that. I remember trying to explain to her how Jesus loved me and loved her and wanted her to believe in Him. And I wanted her to believe so that she would enjoy in eternity with me. She just laughed at me. And then she said, “C’mon! You’re a smart kid! You’re smarter than that aren’t you? You don’t believe all that hogwash, do you? Them holy rollers never did a thing to help me. I had to work hard for all I got. And all they want me to do is fork over money to them so they can build their big fancy churches, where they can get together and pretend that they’re all better than everyone else. Well, who needs them! And you can just stop with all your holy roller messages because I don’t need that either!” I remember feeling pretty low after that.

## **The Gospel That Causes Division**

Proclaiming the Gospel causes division. That's because in a spiritual sense there is no sitting on the fence. There is no having your cake and eating it too. You are either a member of Christ's kingdom by faith, or you are lost and headed for eternal damnation. In our Gospel Lesson Jesus is describing for His disciples then, as well as us here today, just how difficult it can be to share our faith with others, especially when those others are members of our family.

This kind of reaction really doesn't make sense. After all the Gospel is a message of peace. Jesus came to make peace between mankind and God. All mankind because of their sin have become enemies of the Holy Creator who designed us to be perfect. God's gift of the Law shows just how far humanity has fallen away from what He created us to be and how He desires that we live. The Gospel presents Jesus as the atoning sacrifice for all mankind, including you and me. For all who believe in Him their sins have been atoned for, their due punishment suffered for, so that they are removed forever from your permanent record. With no sin charged against you the door has been opened for you to no longer be God's enemy, but His precious child by faith. What an awesome message that is! Have you ever been around someone who has newly come to faith? They gush with joy and love for Christ and have a burning desire to share that joy with others. You would think that everyone we meet would want to hear this message and have that saving faith applied to their hearts and lives!

But the effect the Gospel message has upon the unbelieving world is often the opposite of peaceful, it brings division. Why is that? One reason is that the unbelieving world is not interested in a God that considers them to be an enemy. The world doesn't want to hear that they are living in disobedience. The world by and large has its own god, one allows them to live in whatever manner is pleasing to them as long as they are not hurting anyone else. This is the god made in man's own image. This god doesn't judge by old fashioned standards and morals that mean nothing today. For them Jesus loves everyone and condones all lifestyles because forgiveness rules. He came so you can live your best life now, if you try hard enough, that is. They have no use for the law.

Then there are others who dismiss all notion of a god. The universe came about by some grand cosmic accident. Life came about by the happenstance spark of lightning that struck some primordial cesspool and the first living organism emerged. There is no design or purpose to life. And there is nothing that comes next when that life ends. So, you might as well go for the gusto now while you're still sucking air.

Still others have been influenced by this new age idea of “the force” from Star Wars. There is a good side to the force and a bad side. Both sides are needed in balance to have a good life. You just have to learn to control the bad side with the influence of the good. Still others borrow from the doctrines of many world religions just as if they were making stew. A pinch of Buddhism, a tablespoon of Islamic Fundamentalism, a cup of eastern mysticism, and they have a god that when you mess up in this life, you get a 2<sup>nd</sup> chance in the next life. So why worry too much about sin?

And across the board there are those who believe in an afterlife of some sort, something that pleases their own dreams and desires. This is a place that those who were “pretty good” in this life get to go to. Not perfect, after all, no one is perfect. But their god grades on a curve and gives extra credit for effort. And who is it that really decides what is good and what is not? Why, their own heart confirms it for them. They think to themselves, “No need to sweat the small stuff concerning the law. After all, I’m a pretty good person. But the question that do not want to face is, ‘How Good is Good Enough?’

No one, not even Christians want to hear the answer to that question. Our sinful heart tries to drown that question out if it ever rears its ugly head. The answer that the unbelieving world doesn’t want to hear is that ‘You have to be perfect’. We all know that this world is not what it’s supposed to be. We all strive to make it a more perfect place. The heaven most people dream about is a perfect place. And for it to continue to be perfect all who go there must also be perfect. In that respect, there is no sliding by “being good enough.” You can’t have your cake and eat it too. You’re either in or out.

This is the faith we are called to witness to. This is the message that we must first proclaim to those who do not believe, that they are not good enough, that you can’t have one foot in the bad force and another in the good side. We need to proclaim that there is a Creator of all things who gave the purpose to life that is living in obedience to Him. And those who do not will be judged unworthy of the eternal paradise to come. That is a very unpopular message, no matter what you believe. But that’s the message they need to hear so the Holy Spirit can show them that the answer to all their problems is Jesus.

## **We are Not Worthy of Him**

**Matthew 10:37 Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.**

Whenever that unpopular message rears its ugly head the unbelieving world finds it difficult to tolerate it. Not one likes to have it shared with them, and they don’t want to see it reflected in your life, especially if you are friends or family.

When the Lord called me back to faith my life began to change. I no longer enjoyed the dirty jokes and stories, I no longer liked to be sarcastic and mean to others just for fun, as many of my friends and co-workers did. I was uncomfortable with how they liked to talk mean and negative behind people's backs. And I no longer had the desire to get drunk, or smoke certain substances like they did. They couldn't accept that I had changed. And so I found that they would poke and prod at me to see if the change was real, or if I was just acting the part. I wanted to go along and still be friends with them, laugh at the jokes, go out for beers, take a little puff. But when I did, I always felt awful inside. I knew I had disappointed my Lord and Savior. I knew that He didn't die and rise again so I could continue this kind of life. I could not love that old life more than I loved my Lord and Savior. But because I did, I realized I was not worthy of Him.

**Matthew 10:38 And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.**

What is this cross that we are called to grab hold and take up? It is not the everyday problems that all people encounter living in a broken fallen world. This cross is all that we are made to suffer because we live a different life from the rest of the world as believers in Christ. It's the temptation to join with the world and do what the world does so that we don't lose our friends. It's the temptation we must fight within ourselves as our sinful heart desires to do what pleases it most, and in cahoots with the devil points to the fact that "Other people are doing it." It's the suffering and grief we experience as we try to witness our faith in a world that doesn't want to hear it. I wish I could tell you that I am always ready to pick up that cross, that I am always ready to fight the good fight and not give in to the world in what I do, say, and think. But that would be a lie. And in this I realize that I am not worthy of Christ; not worthy to be His Disciple. Sometimes I love myself and the world more than I love Him.

### **Christ Makes Us Worthy: He loved Us More**

**Matthew 10:39 Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.**

For every time I try to find my life in this world and make my life about what the world sees as important or good, every time I try to live with one foot in this world, I threaten to lose the life that God desires me to have.

But Christ loves me too much to see me fade away into unbelief. He loves you too much to see you fade away into unbelief and rejoin the world in its march toward eternal separation and death. So, He came and gave up His life in this world so that you might be given new life in Him. His Spirit comes to you and points out all the ways you are walking in step with the world, making others and your own sinful desires more important than Him. He convicts you through the Law how wrong this is. And then through your baptismal connection with Christ moves you to die to that life lived in step with the world as you confess your sins and repent of them. He turns you from living to please yourself back to living in love toward Him. And you can do this because Christ paid the price for you to have that new life once again. He cleans you up and places you back in step with His Spirit. He makes you lose that life of sin and find and live by faith the life that He died and rose again to give to you. It's the life lived out with Him now in repentant faith that leads you all the way to eternal life to come. And that is a life that is a worthy witness to others.

## **Conclusion**

There are still times when I try to have my cake and eat it too. There are times when my life looks more like that of the unbelieving world than that of a follower of Jesus Christ. There are times when that cross that I am called to carry as I follow after Him just seems too heavy. But I am not left to live out this life in the world alone. Jesus is always with me. He reaches out and shows me how I'm following a world that's headed toward destruction. And He turns me to begin walking in the opposite direction, in obedience to His Spirit's guiding in His Word. I do not live out this life of faith alone. Thank God I have you, my brothers and sisters in Christ. Together we make our way through this world, supporting one another, praying for one another, lifting one another up. Together we witness how wonderful it is to give up living to please the world and instead live for the One who gave His life so that we can have life with Him now and eternal life to come. Together we find the strength to share that Gospel of peace, trusting that the Holy Spirit can do in the lives of others what He has already done in our lives. May He continue that among us now and until that day He calls us home. Amen.