

SERMON 7/9/2025: SUNDAY BETWEEN 4 AND 10 SEPTEMBER OS23:
GEOFF CHADWICK: LUKE 14:25-35
“HATING FATHER, MOTHER, WIFE AND CHILDREN”
Luke 14.25–35

*²⁵ Now large crowds were travelling with him; and he turned and said to them,
²⁶ ‘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. ²⁷ Whoever does not
carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸ For which of you, intending to
build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has
enough to complete it? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to
finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, ³⁰ saying, “This fellow began to build
and was not able to finish.” ³¹ Or what king, going out to wage war against another
king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose
the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³² If he cannot, then, while the
other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. ³³ So
therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your
possessions. ³⁴ ‘Salt is good; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be
restored? ³⁵ It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure heap; they throw it away. Let
anyone with ears to hear listen!’*

Today’s Gospel reading gives us a great lesson in understanding context. This is one of those passages, which, if taken out of context can lead to a great deal of misunderstanding. To begin with, the verse:

*²⁶ ‘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. (Lk 14:26 NRSV)*

if taken in isolation, could lead one to believe that Christians should turn their backs on their families.

Some of you may recall the situation portrayed in the musical *Fiddler on the Roof* where Tevye, the Jewish father of three daughters turns his back on his youngest who has chosen to marry a Christian. He proclaims that she is now *Dead to him*. Whilst not a Christian context, the idea is the same. Having said this there is a glimmer of redemption towards the end of the musical when Tevye blesses his daughter.

Sadly, such exclusivist family behaviour has been a blight on religious faith everywhere. Christianity is not exempt- certain exclusivist sects are known for it-although I would be so bold to say, that in my reckoning they are not actually Christian. So what to make of this verse? Well we need to know the context. In fact there are several.

1) The context within book of Luke itself.

Jesus is on the road to Jerusalem and crucifixion. Opposition is on the rise. The verse before ours, says:

²⁵ Now large crowds were travelling with him; (Lk 14:24, NRSV)

This is a double-edged sword. Large crowds mean Jesus is being taken seriously, but they also point to a crisis of popularity. The religious authorities are soon to become jealous and plot his death. This, of course is hinted at in the following verses:

²⁷ Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:27, NRSV)

And:

³³ So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions. (Lk 14:33, NRSV)

These are hints of the difficulties to come which will culminate in the events of Good Friday and beyond. As we know, the first believers were persecuted for their faith. Jesus is pointing out that faith in him will not be an easy ride!

2) The context of the text in the other Gospels.

Biblical theory tells us that both Luke and Matthew have taken this verse from an older common yet to be found, source fondly called Q (or *Quell*, meaning *Source*, in German).

When we compare Matthew and Luke's versions, we see that even Matthew has toned down

the original. Rather than *hate father and mother* (Lk 26, NRSV), he has edited it to say *more than me*:

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. (Mtt 10:37, NRSV)

There's some comfort in knowing that at least one of the Gospel writers understood the danger of the word *hate*!

But before we explain the meaning of the word away, we must understand another context.

3) The context of the first hearers of the Passage.

The first hearers of the passage were the Christians of around AD90. They are on the other side of the events of holy week. Also they are living through the horrors of religious persecution. Luke's second volume, *The book of Acts* makes this very clear. The stoning of Steven illustrates it well:

⁵⁴ When they heard these things, they became enraged and ground their teeth at Stephen.^[h] ⁵⁵ But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶ "Look," he said, "I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" ⁵⁷ But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. ⁵⁸ Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him, and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. (Act 7:54-58, NRSV)

Luke knows that families turned on family members who had chosen to follow Christ. It was not an easy time. Furthermore, Luke knows that followers were tempted to leave the church because they were under family pressure. He is encouraging them to remain steadfast. Jesus had forewarned their predecessors, and Stephen serves as an example of perseverance under pressure.

Sometimes it's difficult for us to comprehend what it was like in AD90. We, who are products of modern western liberal democracy, are used to the idea of *freedom of religion* but

it not so back then. And dare I say, its not so in many parts of the world today. Religious persecution is alive and well!

4) And that brings me to the present context.

I think we can contemplate this passage in terms of what we now call *dysfunctional families*.

Perhaps we can interpret the statement:

... *hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters* (Lk 14:26, NRSV)

to mean *hating their dysfunction*. If that's the case, then we are speaking against domestic violence in all its forms: physical, mental, social, emotional and spiritual.

Curiously, when you look at definitions of abuse, the category of *Spiritual* is often omitted. I guess these definitions have been written by non-religious people, but we know that the Spiritual realm is vitally important for who we are as human beings.

Spiritual abuse includes: forcing others to believe certain things, punishing people for practicing their faith, and ridiculing another's beliefs. Such things, especially if perpetrated by family members, are to be hated.

So, I need to be careful here, as some of you may be (or have been) victims of such abuse. If that's the case, and old wounds have been opened please find a trusted friend to talk to.

Having said this, there's always the other side of things. We must ask ourselves if we are a perpetrator as well. Maybe not capital "P", but small "p". Maybe there are times when without any considered thought, we are ready to belittle those whose expressions of faith are different from our own. Or, without thought, we judge others poorly for fleeing domestic violence when we know nothing of the facts.

Yes, *hate* is a powerful and frightful word. But Luke, following Jesus, would remind us that in the face of evil it is the most appropriate response.

So in the words of the blessing given at our confirmation services:

Let us:

*Go forth into the world in peace;
be of good courage;
hold fast that which is good;
[and] render to no one evil for evil. (AAPB p93)*

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.