

“IS THERE SALT IN YOUR SHAKER,” Luke 14:25-35, Proper 18-C, September 8, 2019

Sir Ernest Shackleton was born in 1874 in Ireland, but when he was **10 years old** his parents moved the family to a suburb of London. At age 23, in 1897, he became an official part of: **“THE HEROIC AGE OF ANTARCTIC EXPLORATION”** though he would eventually die of a heart attack in 1922 when he was 58 years old.

But 18 years before his death, in **December 1914, when he was 40 years old, ERNEST SHACKLETON** set out with 28 other men on the IMPERIAL TRANS-ANTARCTIC EXPEDITION. In recruiting other men to work alongside of him, Ernest Shackleton is **credited with running the most successful “WANT AD”** in history! And how did it read? It went like this: ***“Men Wanted for Hazardous Journey. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger. Safe return doubtful, but with plenty of honor and recognition in case of success!”***

Psychologists tell us that people who are alive, by far, sense that they are the most fully alive, when then they are committed to some great cause for which they are willing to risk their lives, or who are on some quest for which they are willing to risk their lives too, whether that quest be space exploration or the pursuit of gold, rubies, emeralds or diamonds.

But long before Ernest Shackleton placed his ad in a local newspaper, **The Triune God** has been looking for and recruiting adventurous individuals willing to risk it all to advance his purposes and declare his glory among the nations.

Friends, these words of Jesus in our Gospel lesson this morning may seem to be so totally outside the character of Jesus, when we first read them, but they are certainly also, words that we must always read within the larger context of St Luke’s Gospel, if we are ever going to understand them properly.

In some respects, these shocking words of Jesus are closely aligned with the Gospel less we heard three weeks ago, on August 18, from the 12 chapter of St. Luke’s Gospel where we heard our Lord say: ***“Don’t think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, for I tell you, but rather division. For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother in law.”***

Three Sundays ago, we said with respect to that text, that Jesus was fully aware of the seemingly **“NEXT TO IMPOSSIBLE SITUATION”** that some of his earliest followers could easily find themselves in, if they came to believe that Jesus was indeed the long-awaited and Promised Savior of the world.

Loyalty to parents and family meant everything in that first century Jewish culture. And daughters, for example, who married outside of the faith and became the wife of a Gentile, might just as quickly come to see themselves as dead to their fathers and mothers and to all who were in her family of origin.

Well, in the opening words of our Gospel lesson today, we hear St. Luke tell us: **“Large crowds accompanied Jesus...”** and these words of St. Luke were not positioned there unimportantly! **There are repeatedly, throughout Luke’s Gospel, large crowds of people following Jesus for a twofold reason:**

(1) Yes, to hear Jesus preach to them the good news of the coming of God’s kingdom into the world;

(2) But just as importantly, I believe, many were hoping to become numbered among the thousands of people, who had already been healed by our Lord of all sorts of physical ailments, diseases and other infirmities.

Jesus knew that while large crowds of people were following him, this did not necessarily mean **that they were all committed disciples of his, because Jesus knew then as Jesus knows today, that there are always those groups of people** who might be classified far more truthfully as **“THE FANS OF JESUS,”** rather than their actually being **“THE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS!”**

How different Jesus was and is to so many other people throughout the history of the world, who rather than being upfront with all of the hard labor, blood, sweat and tears that could easily become associated with some sort of potential career to which they were being called, would seek only to tell them the positive benefits of that job, Jesus is willing to be 100% truthful with any people back then, just as he is willing to be 100% truthful with any who might become his followers today.

Still it is a profound statement, Jesus makes, right? “If any would come to me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, AND EVEN HIS OWN LIFE, HE CANNOT BE MY DISCIPLE!”

Well, let me tell you first of all friends, as any truthful Bible teacher will tell you that the verb in both the Hebrew language of the Old Testament and the Greek language of the New Testament, that is translated into English as “hate,” is not nearly so strong and toxic as the verb “to hate” is in our own English language.

There is only one time in the whole Old Testament where we read that God “hated” anyone. And that is in the last book of the Old Testament, in the book of the Minor Prophet Malachi, where the writer has God saying in **Malachi 1:12, “Jacob I loved, while Esau, I hated!”**

What this word means in the Bible is to **“love less.”** **And there’s one other instance in the Old Testament I might bring to your attention this morning also. You might remember the story of Jacob found in the Old Testament, whose original name “Jacob” means “deceiver,”** because he often was in a position in life where he was doing his best to **“deceive” other people;** like the day when he **deceived his brother Esau into giving to him the birthright that was rightfully Esau’s,** because Esau came home from a hunting expedition and was **absolutely starved. While Jacob was cooking up a big pot of porridge, Jacob tells his starving brother: “I’ll give you a bowl of porridge for your birthright!”**

While the Lord certainly was **not pleased with Jacob because of his dishonesty**, maybe the **LORD GOD** was even **more displeased with Esau, for giving away his birthright for such a CHEAP PRICE! But God continued also to be good to Esau.** St. Paul also quotes this Old Testament verse of Malachi 1:12, in Romans 9:16, where he too has God saying, ***“Jacob, I loved Esau I hated.”***

You might also remember also how Jacob’s Uncle Laban deceived him into marrying his older daughter Leah, who was not nearly as physically attractive, as Rachel was. The Bible says say Jacob loved Rachel, because she “had a sparkle in her eyes,” while Leah did not have a “sparkle” in her eyes. In Genesis 29:31, we read: “And when the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren!”

How could Jesus Christ, hereby, make such an outstanding claim for himself in the eyes of his followers? It’s because the very same God who spoke to the children of Israel, gathered around the foot of Mount Sinai, shortly after they were released from 400 years of slavery in Egypt, saying to them: ***“You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3), is the very same God who is speaking to them, now clothed in our human flesh and blood!***

Friends to help us better understand the **true spirit of Jesus’ words here**, let me also share with you some **words of his to his would-be disciples that are recorded for us in 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, and whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me!”**

Here Jesus is asking his followers up front to take out some much need time to count the cost! Would the price they might be asked to follow Jesus, in genuinely becoming his disciples, be a price they are willing to pay or not!

Therefore, in our 21st Century World, can’t we also hear Jesus instructing us to whip our pocket calculator out of our shirt pocket or purse, and to begin to tabulate for ourselves, the cost of following him. For what person sets out to build a tower, without figure out first, whether he has enough capital funds at his disposal to create the project or not. Or what king, Jesus asks, who is preparing to go to battle with another nation, doesn’t take out the necessary time to properly evaluate his opponent’s army? When that king discovers that he only has 10,000 men in his army, while his opponent has 20,000 men in his army—well—all of a sudden it becomes a “no brainer,” as we used to say a few years back: and that king goes to his would-be opponent and asks for terms of peace immediately.

“Please, pass the salt!” It used to be a simple request but nowadays people in the United States are more concerned about their personal consumption of salt than they have ever been before!

Why? Because the intake of too much salt in too many Americans' daily diets has resulted, the Surgeon General tells us, in an epidemic of High Blood Pressure, throughout our nation!

Physicians tells us that most Americans need somewhere between 1 pound up to 16 pounds of salt annually, more salt if you are longer and very physically active but if you are older and less physically active, then your intake of salt should be greatly reduced.

In the ancient world, SALT SERVED THREE GREAT PURPOSES: (1) Flavor enhancer, (2) A preservative; and (3) as a form of currency, medium of exchange, money!

In Jesus' day Roman soldiers were still payed with salt, and the Latin word for "salt" was "sal" which eventually blossomed and bloomed into our English word "salary." It from these associations also that we got those old sayings: "He worth his salt!" Or "He earns his salt!" Or "He's worth his weight in salt!"

But Jesus went on to site a problem that people had back in those days in dealing with their salt that we no longer have in our day today. You can put salt in a saltshaker in your favorite buffet where you store that saltshaker alongside the pepper dispenser along side your grandmother's china. Then you can take it out on Thanksgiving Day, shake it on your food and it would be as good as the day it was purchased at Publix.

But the salt in Jesus day was often collected from salt brine exported from such places as the Dead Sea. In the gathering of that salt, it would be gathered with other impurities, and those other impurities over time would make that salt appear to be very similar to a "chalky" substance that was no longer good for a thing.

I always prefer those clear glass, saltshakers, so you can look right inside of them and see if they have any salt or pepper in them or not. But many salt and pepper shakers, that people collect to be part of a collection, are not clear glass but very opaque in nature; meaning you can't see through them.

In his Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5, Jesus says also to his disciples: "You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt loses its saltiness, what good is it. It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out onto the street and trampled under the feet of men!"

So, whether your life is more like clear glass or very opaque in nature, the question still comes to us, I believe, from the Savior: "Is there salt in your shaker!"

- (1) Is the world, and especially the church, a better place for others to be because of the way you so faithfully and routinely season it with God's love?**
- (2) Is the world not quite so spoiled and saved from some of its rottenness because you are in it?**
- (3) Is the world more conscientious of the price Christ has paid with his perfect life, death and resurrection, and the gift of eternal life, because you are in it?**

Is there salt in your shaker? AMEN