

I think I have a very difficult task this morning. God's word today is a lion whose fangs will tear you limb from limb. You expect me to take this lion and extract its teeth so when it grasps you, no harm shall come to you.

God's word this morning is a crushing weight that will squeeze all life from you. And I hope to be able to make it a light burden, that you can carry comfortably.

God's word is a bullet aimed at your heart, a word that means death to you if it is not deflected. For my sake and yours I come to this sermon hoping to deflect that bullet so that it will only graze you, causing a superficial wound.

Listen to what Jesus speaks to the large crowd, to you: Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even life itself, cannot be my disciple.

Most everything I read about this verse says that Jesus really does not mean hate but to love less. But I know that for me, at least, that does not get me off the hook. Do I love Jesus more than my family? Some of you remember the Holy Week and Easter I was not here, when I went to watch my son swim in his final NCAA meet rather than to celebrate the death and resurrection of our Lord here, with you. Some of you tell me how you are going to miss a meeting, or a Bible Study or a worship service because of family obligations and I assume you are making a good choice when you put family first. Talking with a friend this week he said, Of course you put your family before Jesus because they are here, and he is not.

But Jesus said, "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters cannot be my disciple."

Jesus said, "Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."

Jesus was not talking about jewelry, nor about coming to church and being the cross bearer. Jesus was talking about loving the poor and the sinners and weak so much that my commitment to them leads to

my suffering. Jesus is saying you cannot be his disciple unless your commitment to Jesus is so deep that you will not turn aside to avoid suffering that will be yours for following him. We are not just talking about inconvenience here, going without a little sleep, nor about serving on some church committees. Is there a neighbor child that needs a lot of your time - even more of your time than you can easily give? Is there an elderly person who is lonely - especially an undeserving elderly person that is hard to be around and is lonely because of it? Is there someone in your family or at work that needs to be forgiven by you - someone who is unrepentant but who really needs your forgiveness? Maybe even ^{needs} to be forgiven seventy times seven? Crosses are never far away when there is love. But when love is narrowed down to include only family and deserving friends you are not following Jesus who died for the ungodly, for his enemies.

Jesus said, whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

Jesus says: None of you can become my disciple, if you do not give up all your possessions.

Everytime I think of really sacrificial giving I offer these excuses: I have to keep enough for my children. I have to provide for my retirement. I need a place to live. I should keep enough for some recreation for myself, and for clothing that is nice enough so that you won't all be ashamed of me as your pastor and enough for a car that will not embarrass me when I go to visit visitors. And then the next thing I know I am telling myself how I work hard and really deserve some nice things too. So I'll give ten percent to God. that should satisfy God.

But Jesus says, None of you can become my disciple, if you do not give up all your possessions.

You are waiting, aren't you? you are waiting for me to extract those teeth from the lion and deflect that bullet and make that load light. What you want me to do and what I want to do is to get God's demands whittled down so that they are manageable for us. Because if they are not manageable and we can't go home and have a peaceful night's sleep and a clear conscience then why bother. Because you and I

would rather sacrifice Jesus than sacrifice our own children, our own lives, our own possessions. Yes, we would rather sacrifice Jesus.

The crowds followed Jesus, cried Hosanna, but in the end crucified him. They sacrificed the only Son of God rather than to follow him in faith.

Our parents will die. Our sisters and brothers will die, ^{Harbinger over, all die,} You and I will die. Our children will die.

Pain and suffering and loss will come to you and me. Even if we do not follow Jesus and carry a cross pain and suffering and loss will come to visit our home.

Our possessions will all crumble and turn to dust. Or be ripped from our grasp by robbers, by storm, by death.

I am the way, the truth and the life, says Jesus. Follow me.

Can you follow Jesus and still have all the rest? The answer is no.

But on the night when no one would follow, Jesus took bread, broke it and gave it to the ones who would betray him and deny him and flee from him, and said, This is my body given for you. He knew what they would do, and he gave his life for them still. His bread, his cup to them.

Nothing has changed today. He gathers a people at this table who have failed him and are failing him and will fail him. You and I. And he says, this is my body given for you, my blood poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Go home and sleep in peace tonight because you have faith in his love. His love for you will never fail.