

June 22, 2014

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

"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."

At first reading.... and at second also if it comes to that...today's scripture sounds harsh, unreasonable and hardly words that our beloved Jesus would use.

Today's Gospel from Matthew is all about the level of our personal commitment to Jesus Christ. A casual "OK I guess Jesus is important..... let us put Him on our list of invitees to events in our life"....is NOT what our Lord is telling us.

Jesus is telling us to order our lives so that He is always front and center, the top priority for us in our lives.

However uncomfortable it may make us, Jesus is saying from the time we wake up in the morning to the last thing at night, He is number one in our lives...a total unyielding, unswerving commitment to Jesus.

If we have these priorities established in our lives, we will create a mirror image of how important we are to God...all of us on this earth without exception equally loved and adored by Jesus Christ.

How simple it all is....but why is it so hard to understand? Why is it so hard for so many of us to commit ourselves totally to Jesus? Why do so many of us find so many excuses to put other priorities ahead of our devotion to Jesus?

When we build our lives on the foundation of total commitment to Christ, the payback is extraordinary....our lives are transformed...we can feel the Holy Spirit in our hearts.. supporting us and giving us the strength necessary to deal with adversity in all its shapes and sizes.

The Holy Spirit sharing in our joys and aspirations...encouraging us in moments of doubt. Telling us that we can meet the goals that we have prayerfully set for ourselves in our lives. Making things possible by opening our minds to opportunity and our capacity to grow and flourish.

All this because we have got our priorities right and have built our lives on the foundation of complete commitment to Jesus Christ before all others and all things..."stuff" as I describe non-essential material wealth and belongings..

For the past two years, Father Chris Pierce, Rector of Grace Hinsdale, one of our partner parishes in our Thursday Sandwich Board, has led a group of young people and chaperones, to the Navajo nation in the Western United States.

The trip is designed for a specific project....and it is a trip that teaches the participants what it means for Jesus Christ to be number one in our lives.

This year they went to Utah build a "Hogan", a traditional Navajo home. The Hogan is the same shape as an Eskimo Igloo. Both designs clearly to insulate the inhabitants from extreme temperatures.

The group have just returned from their adventure, and a close friend of ours was the official photographer for the trip. The Hogan they built was for the Episcopal Bishop and his wife who had been living in a run-down RV.

The trip was a great success from a number of perspectives....the gifts that the youth brought to the Navajos....the joy of their shared experience and the love and support the young people enjoyed with each other as they went about doing God's work.

They experienced the wonders and rawness of nature, the azure colored sky that went on forever. The countless stars in the universe. The strange plants in the desert, the gecko that suddenly appeared straight out of the TV commercial, without an English accent, we were told.

Then the dangerous and unpleasant side ..the sudden sandstorm that put a gritty blanket on everything and you couldn't see the person standing next to you. The 29 hour bus ride and the effect of two days without showersyuck!!

The group arrived home invigorated, joyful and filled to the brim with love for each other, for our world, and for their achievement in improving the life of others.

Most importantly the young people were truly working for Jesus.....they were putting His work first ...Left, Right and Center; they were committed and dedicated.....

I am presently in a course of physical therapy aimed originally at pain in my back. I was not at all impressed to have to endure this therapy, but have made good progress ..

On Friday morning, my body was tired. I had also been working on this sermon....and I don't like interruptions when thus engaged. In addition I had other work obligations.

With much grumbling, I forced myself out the door and drove to the PT office with nothing but negativity oozing out of my pores. I entered the facility...started my normal routine and within a few minutes, everything changed.

I matched my personal record on one machine and received compliments from all and sundry, therapists and other patients on my apparent weight loss.

The therapy is not happening without some serious conversation, pro and con in my own mind...but the results so far are positive.

I love the people at the facility, Lisa, Jackie and Miss Vivian the therapy staff....and the other patients, Mary, Gary, Rudy and so on. We are like a family and support each other through humor, stories and other distractions.

They even laugh at my jokes !!! Karen threatens to visit the facility and tell them what I am really like to live with...but enough of that !!
The relevance to today's Gospel?.....For the first time in many years I am committed to looking after my physical body. God made me and I, in turn wish to underscore my

commitment to Jesus Christ by doing what I can to be pain-free, to lose weight and become as healthy as I can be in areas that I can control. All to be available as long as possible.... to do God's work and be healthy and available to my family and friends.

We all wake-up every day, but particularly for those with work commitments, the hardest day is a Monday. I am told there are two types of persons when it comes to waking on Monday. Good.....God its Monday !! and others Good God..its Monday !! Oldies but goodies.

When we wake on a Sunday morning, some people have a choice...a decision to make. Should we rise and attend worship with our community at Trinity church in Aurora? Or should we just sleep late...after all we deserve it. Or should we take the kids to any of the numerous scheduled school activities? Or should we go swimming or fishing...after all God made this Summer to enjoy...I am sure he didn't intend us to be stuck in that hot stuffy building on Benton Street, listening to those preachers going on and on about things that have no relevance to my life....and I really don't fully understand the value of being part of Christ's Community participating in worship and communion together.

We all have to search our hearts for the right choice....which choice is the right one. Which choice makes me worthy of the love of God. Which choice commits us to Jesus Christ? Which choice puts our Lord first and foremost in our lives.

And the decision to attend worship here together does not mean once in a while...it means every week that we have strength and a way to get here.

There is no compromise and no excuse...and how can I be so certain about what I am saying? Because Jesus told us in clear, unambiguous language in today's Gospel...and we can't explain it away by a misinterpretation in a particular translation.

We are being told to behave in exactly the same way as God is committed to us.

The young people on their journey to the Navajo nation, the staff and patients at the physical therapy center and all the members of our worship community here at Trinity....all of us understand that Jesus Christ comes first in our lives.

It is as simple as that. Amen.