

RUMC- "The road to the cross- a new way"
March 29. 2009

One author I read this week strongly suggested that if we did not want to lose members in the congregation, then don't preach this passage, "it will precipitate a crisis among honest people, it will trouble their hearts, this truth will keep them tossing and turning at night wondering if they are part of the kingdom, wondering if they are living by its principles, wondering if they can live up to discipleship." He recommended other passages that highlight the **benefits** we have in Jesus. He recommended keeping the peace among those who call themselves followers of Jesus. He implored "Don't preach this passage - people will leave."

The problem is we don't get to pick and choose which parts of Jesus' teachings we follow, or preach. If I am to be an honest preacher I have to honestly grapple with what this means for my people. If I am to be an honest preacher **I** have to spend the nights tossing and turning trying to figure out how to present this hard truth to the people. And if we are to be honest in our discipleship we have to grapple with this difficult but central saying of the one we are to follow.

How can we ignore a teaching that is so central to who Jesus was that it is recorded in all four gospels (Matthew 16:25; Mark 8:34-5 and Luke 9:23-24) in very similar hard sayings. So let's face it head on.

The heart of what Jesus says is ***25The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.***

There is a problem with language here. We are taught that love is good and hate is bad. And that is true- if you are talking about God or people. To hate God or people would be a bad thing.

In this passage it is love that is bad.

Let's try out a few things. Our society tells us that the good life is having money. Does the person who loves money get to keep it to eternal life? No.

Our society tells us that the good life is being popular and having a lot of friends on facebook. Does the person who loves popularity get to take their friends to eternal life? No.

Our society tells us that the good life is getting ahead- even if you have to step on some toes to get there. Does the person who loves getting ahead get to take their power and prestige to eternal life? No.

Our society tells us that he who dies with the most toys wins. Does the one who loves their toys the most get to take the ATV's and computers, and boats and other fancy toys to eternal life? No.

If we love life as it is commonly defined we there are so many distractions we may end up missing everything that's really important -- in life and eternity.

So if we love life in this way we will lose-- if we hate the things of this life- if we hate the priorities of this world, we keep true life to eternity.

No one has left yet- I guess I'll keep going. . .

Jesus actually makes the statement we have been talking about in order to explain one that is more difficult. I think it is the other way around for us. I think this might be easier.

Jesus is actually explaining what he meant when he said "Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains a single grain. But if it dies it bears much fruit."

Let's translate that to corn because it is so familiar to us. What good is a kernel of corn standing in the field? You leave the stalk, the ear, and this particular kernel all alone out in the field. Come on guys.

- If you leave it standing in the field are you going to make any money from it?
- If you leave it standing in the field, can a pioneer sell it as seed for next year?
- If you leave it standing in the field can cattle eat it and convert it to meat?

- If you leave it standing in the field how long before it turns into corn flakes and ends up on my breakfast table.
- If that kernel loves its kernel-ness and refuses to become seed, or food, or flour or meal or sweetener what is going to happen? It will rot.

Unless a kernel of corn falls to the ground and germinates; or is ground up and eaten by livestock; or is cooked into sweetener or ethanol; or is turned into cornflakes. . . unless that kernel gives up its kernel-ness it will remain a single kernel and will rot.

If it gives up its kernel-ness, if it stops holding on to its kernel-ness, if it stops loving itself so much and allows itself to be planted, or ground, or cooked, or made into cereal it will become something even better.

Jesus is saying . . . If we love what we are so much that we refuse to change we will simply rot and miss out on eternal life. If on the other hand if we love God so much that in comparison every other love looks like hate. . . if we love God more than this world, more than this life, more than this body, more than ourselves so much that we are glad to give up ourselves, die to our old selves, we will germinate in God's love and grow into eternal life.

The road to the cross is not the road of this world. It is not the road of safety and security. It is not the road of comfort and ease. It is a new road. It may be an unfamiliar road, but it is a wonderful road- it is a road that leads to life-- a road that leads to eternity.

Let's travel that road together.

AMEN