

SERMON

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Here we are, starting this focus on creation and our part in the goodness of what God made...and we get this really, **really** difficult passage from Luke's Gospel. In all my sermons I try to stick to the grace side of God's promises – the gospel side of the law & gospel equation. I do that for a very specific reason: I think we get enough law from the world around us. I think the world is really good at telling us what we deserve and what we've earned and I want to always remind you that we **don't** get what we deserve when it comes to God, in fact the whole point of the good news is that we have been set free from what we deserve by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and nothing can ever change that. Nothing that we do or fail to do will change God's love for us. Ever.

And then Jesus messes it all up with words.

There we are, travelling along with the crowds when Jesus tells them (and us) that we have to hate everyone we love to be a disciple. We have to hate life itself and carry a cross if we want to follow Jesus. There's no way to escape the harshness of these words. There's no way to explain them away. It might be a bit of hyperbole from Jesus, but it's still there. Being a true disciple has to come first in front of everything else.

It might not be about fostering an emotional hate for our family, but we're supposed to put them second to following Jesus. And I don't know how you do that. I can't really even imagine what that looks like in today's world. That's hard to hear and acknowledge.

In a time when it's hard to hold onto hope, in a time when it's far easier to feel overwhelmed than accomplished...we're reminded of how much we struggle to do what is asked of us. Jesus gives us very little room to maneuver. No matter how we might try to soften what he says, we can't live up to what he asks of us.

But maybe that's where we can start to find the hope we need - where we start to find the grace.

It can be helpful to remember that when it all feels hopeless, when it all feels overwhelming, **that's** when we are in the place where it's easiest to see the grace that we are offered. Precisely when it feels like we are failing so completely is when we frame these words with what Jesus says later in this Gospel, "Those who heard [Jesus] said, "Then who can be saved" ²⁷ [he] replied, "What is impossible for mortals is possible for God."

The impossible is possible when God is at work. The impossible is possible when we remember that we **aren't** the center of the story, God is. We are the ones who put everything else first, we are the ones who don't understand the costs, we are the ones who

try to wage war instead of seeking peace, no matter the odds.

And in this Season of Creation, our focus is on remembering how we all orbit around the God who is at the center. Because our tendency to put our lives first ahead of God means that we also tend to put our lives ahead of everything that God has made. We look at the world around us and all that we've been given becomes the cost that we count as the tower builder. The goodness of creation becomes little more than resources that we can exploit for our own purposes. All the resources are merely tools for us.

But God is still the center of the story. God has created the world with interdependence built into it and we are part of that good creation. We aren't in the center, but we are deeply connected to everyone and everything around us. For generations we've interpreted the creation story as if we were set above the world around us – to **dominate** everything else, because we have trouble interpreting the word "dominion". But with God at the center of the story, we start to find a way forward through the hopelessness into a world that more closely resembles the unbroken garden where it all began.

From where we stand in that orbit, from where we stand in our place of interconnection, we count the cost in a good way. We look around us at what is broken, at what needs to be built and we try to figure out what we can do to finish what God asks of us. We look at the tower that is built on this interconnected mutuality and think about the partners who are building with us instead of looking only to ourselves.

With God at the center, we sue for peace with creation since there is no way we can win...because we're not supposed to be at war with God's good creation. We're supposed to be journeying together with all that God has made. Maybe we can find peace when we stop putting ourselves first over and over and over again.

We enter this Season of Creation prayerfully trying to understand our place in a struggling world. We enter prayerfully into a period of reflection as we try to find our meaning. Once we firmly center our prayer and life on God and God's story, maybe we can figure out how to act. Maybe we can figure out where Jesus is leading us. Hopefully, we will realize just how truly interconnected creation is.

Because the world needs us to pray our way into the right mindset. The world needs us to act on what we hear from God. The world needs us to stop putting ourselves in the center so that we aren't blind to the consequences of our actions. The world – in all its interconnected beauty belongs to God. We belong to God.

Thank God it's not all on us. Thank God we aren't in charge. The moment we figure

that out, we're carrying the right cross. We're following the way of Jesus. We're living the life of discipleship we've been called to live. Together. With God at the center. Amen.