

Sermon
August 14, 2016

Introduction:

Growing up, the Girl Scouts of Western Ohio held an annual overnight at COSI, the Center for Science and Industry in Columbus, OH. My troop went several years in a row. And one of those years we all went home with our very own.... Hermit crabs. Unlike kittens or puppies or even guinea pigs, hermit crabs, to an elementary age student, are kind of lame pets. You can't cuddle them, take them on walks or teach them tricks. They're really kind of boring. That is until they begin to molt. Just like all other crustaceans hermit crabs have a hard exoskeleton that they must shed every 18 months or so in order to grow.

The process of molting is fascinating, and a bit scary, and amazing to witness. Molting is incredibly stressful for hermit crabs, especially the time between shedding their exoskeleton and their new exoskeleton hardening. They spend several weeks preparing for the molt and owners learn to watch for these signs so that they'll know it's about to happen. Knowing your hermit crab is about to molt is important. As a responsible owner, you have to isolate your molting crab from any others in your "crab habitat"/aquarium for their safety because molting crabs are incredibly vulnerable. Today's gospel lesson, a daunting read at first, gives us an opportunity to examine how we might react during the difficult, vulnerable times in our own lives.

Body:

Exegesis

First we must understand how these words were understood in a first-century world. At that time, in both Jewish and Gentile circles, the household was the fundamental building block for society. Households were like a microcosm of the larger social reality. The fact that Jesus includes women in the outlining of the division that is to take place reinforces Luke's understanding that both men and women will have the opportunity to respond, either positively or negatively, to God's agenda.

And God's agenda is exactly what Jesus is presenting here. In this passage Jesus breaks from his message of peace and reconciliation, a major theme throughout Luke's gospel, to bring a sobering word of truth. His missional advent is not one of affirmation for the current social status quo. He is announcing here that his mission and life's work will upset the current reality so familiar to these first-century families. By using the illustration of family members being divided we are reminded that one's identity, vocation or status will no longer be determined by family ties. Instead they will now be determined by whether or not they choose to follow Jesus.

Theological Analysis

Theologian Audrey West wrote a very helpful commentary that greatly aided my understanding of this passage. She explained that this particular section of scripture should be understood as *descriptive* rather than *prescriptive*. She makes this suggestion by considering this passage within the overarching theme of the entire gospel story. Hasn't Jesus spent most of his time preaching and teaching about peace and how to work toward it? Perhaps his purpose is not to set children against their parents or families against each other. Instead, Jesus is merely describing the realities of the human story and reminding us of the division that can result when we accept Christ's work. There's a reason why religion and politics are often banned discussion topics around family dinner tables!

Just three chapters after this passage, we find in Luke 15 a perfect example of the kind of division that comes when one member of a family follows Jesus' way of reconciliation. In the story of the Prodigal, when the younger son returns home and is welcomed by his grace-filled

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father, what happens? The older son and father have it out in the backyard due to the older son's inability to understand this in-breaking of the kingdom of God. Once again we are reminded that we humans often do not appreciate it when we realize that following God requires us to lay aside our own ideas of how things should be. Especially if it means welcoming a stranger, loving our enemies and praying for those who persecute us.

Application

Everyday each one of us is called upon to make decisions about whether or not we are going to follow Jesus and how that will affect our relationships with one another. Some decisions are surely more difficult than others:

- Do we invite the new kid to sit with us in the lunchroom on the first day of school?
- What will we say to the person at work who took credit for the project that we completed?
- When our children ask us questions about the election, what will we say regarding candidates we may not agree with?
- Who do we include in our prayers? Are there people we deem unworthy?

For many of us we decided to follow Jesus years ago. We have spent many years learning how following Jesus informs our relationships, decisions and in what ways, if any, it has caused division in our lives. Each time we have made a decision for Christ, our faith grows and we've become more sure of our identity in Christ.

This year we have seven confirmands. For some, this will be the year they choose to Confirm their faith and affirm their commitment to Christ. For others they may decide that now is not the time, and that will be OK. Rather like molting season for hermit crabs, this season of Confirmation is a vulnerable and challenging time. Deciding to follow Jesus is not a choice to be made lightly or just because "everyone else is doing it." Jesus himself has described to us the potential outcome of making this decision, division and a life that will be turned upside down. Now is the time these youth will be allowed to shed their elementary faith in order to grow into the new and deeper faith of young adulthood.

Conclusion

But the care and attention given to these youth must be the exact opposite of what we give a molting hermit crab. Instead of isolating them and leaving them alone the St. David's community must rally to support and encourage these young people. We must remain attentive and look and listen for the signs that these youth are ready to grow. What questions are they asking? What might we need to explain or discuss with them to help inform their decision-making process? Instead of needing complete darkness these youth need to see the light and love of Christ on display. And isn't that what we all need in our continuing faith journeys? Support and love and a community that will hold us during the challenging times when we feel most vulnerable in order to help us come out stronger on the other side?

On the surface this is indeed a challenging text. But how good is it to know that God re-creates us continually to allow us to grow more fully into disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world! I challenge you to find a way to support a fellow Christian in their journey this week; this year; this life. You may just find that your own life will never be the same.