

**If you asked me to make a choice between
Coconut almond fudge ice cream and mint chocolate chip ...
there's no problem! Coconut almond fudge would win hands down...**

**But if you asked me to make a choice between
coconut almond fudge and black cherry ice cream...
ohh....now I have a problem.**

**Choices such as these, although perhaps difficult are necessary,
since eating both kinds of ice cream in one sitting is not good for my health
or my waistline!**

**But, why, I wonder, does Jesus seemingly set up the choice between loving him and loving
our parents, or our children...**

**Try as I might with all the research I did, I could not find anyone
shedding a new perspective on this Gospel....
scholars agree, at least the ones that I consulted,
that Jesus really did set up this dilemma...
and I found myself, to be honest, resisting and might I say, resenting
having to make a choice between Jesus and those that I love most dearly...**

So, let's explore what is going on here...

**There are other places in the Gospels where Jesus isn't really all that considerate of his
family...**

**At one point in Luke's gospel, a woman calls out: "Blessed is the womb that bore you and
the breasts that nursed you! but he said, 'Blessed rather are those who hear the word of
God and obey it! (Luke 11: 27-28) He just dissed his mother....**

**Then, at another point a man wants to follow Jesus, but first wants to bury his Father...
and Jesus tells him 'let the dead bury their own dead' (Matt 8:22)...**

**Then, there's the time, in Matthew's gospel (12: 49-50)
that Jesus is told that his mother and brothers were waiting for him outside...
And pointing to his disciples, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers!
For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.'**

**When you put it all together,
Jesus is not really the 'good, loyal son' that every mother dreams of,
at least not to his family...
His radical, focused nature often times ran into conflict not only with the Roman and
Temple authorities, but with his own family as well...**

**To be rebellious towards the oppressive Roman empire...no problem there...
to reject the oppression of the Pharisees...no problem there either...
but to reject one's own family...well, that's a problem especially in ancient times..
in Ancient times Family was essential ...
there was no survival outside of family...
your whole life, your identity, your purpose was found inside
your family and kin...
Jesus was so radical in this regards,
that at one point in Mark's gospel, (3: 20-21) it is written:
his family...went out to restrain him, for people were saying,
'He has gone out of his mind'**

**Even we who live in this 21st century struggle with his attitude towards his family...
because we've heard way too many cult leaders convince people to reject their family and
friends to be comfortable with this gospel...**

So how might we understand what Jesus is saying in a life giving way??

First of all, let's be clear:

Jesus did call some people away from their families, and invited them to follow him.

That was a very, very radical invitation...then and now...

**Some people, today, do leave their families to care for the poor,
to work for the good of the world
and to work for peace and justice...**

But notice that Jesus does not advise rejecting family and friends...

He said we cannot love our families more than God....

he is trying to teach the proper priority of loyalty and allegiance....

We have to remember that the ancient worldview was dualistic...

there was heaven/earth...

Either you were in or you were out....

But, Jesus saw himself as a bridge between these two worlds...

His whole life was given to proclaiming the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth...

In our reading today, talking to his disciples He puts it this way

**“Whoever welcomes you (meaning the disciples) welcomes me,
and whoever welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me...”**

So Jesus not setting up an either/or situation between God and family...

but he is inviting us to see that love is all of one piece, starting with Yahweh...

When we love God, as our true Source of life and love..

we will Love our parents and children in healthy, life giving ways....

and still have plenty of love to share...

In our times...we know that there is no heaven up there...

We understand that God is in here...in all of us...

So, to say we love God is to love God's presence right next to us...

You cannot say you love God while bashing your neighbor...

you cannot say you love your neighbor without loving God...

God IS love...as we say each week!

It's all of one piece...

One more point worth noting:

Most of the time Jesus was preaching to the poor, the uneducated, the misfits...

Offering someone else a cup of cold water,

might, literally, be taking the water from their own lips...

They lived on the cusp between life and death...

Could you blame them for being tempted to resort to unethical means to gain food, shelter, clothing and status...

Could you blame them for not wanting to share what little food and water they had with others?

When he said: "Those who find their life will lose it,

and those who lose their life for my sake will find it"

he's telling them...If you try too hard to save your life,

if you resort to being selfish, stealing or lying in order to save your life...

your body might be alive,

but your heart and your soul is dead...

and THAT is still so very true today.

If the 'life' that we are seeking...

keeps us racing about and we miss the beauty of a sunset....

If we are working ourselves into a nervous breakdown for more money and status...

and rarely take time to hear birdsong or the laughter of children...

if we fail to hold the hand of the woman who just lost her husband

or do not have the time to listen to the frustration of the unemployed young man...

if we refuse to help those who are starving for food or affection or comfort....

because we want more and more stuff.....

then we have truly died before we die...we have indeed lost our life...

When we keep our priorities in order...

when love... authentic, life giving love becomes

the first and foremost priority of our day...

we don't have to make a choice between Loving our family,

loving our neighbor and loving our God...

Our love will flow through our lives and our lives will flow in God's love...

Our love will flow to all we meet, human and non human alike..

Our lives will have integrity and deep peace...

and We will know that heaven and earth have come together....

that the Reign of God has been made known in our lives, here and now...

and then...we can truly say, 'thank you' Amen.

oh by the way...

anyone want to go for a double scoop ice cream cone sometime...??