

Attachments are powerful and important things. There are attachments to people, to loved ones, friends and family that give us meaning and belonging. There are attachments to things and places - locations where we have memories; buildings like churches, or places like homes that hold significance for good or ill. There are attachments to routines, habits and possessions that give us structure and security.

Any and all of these attachments work in us at a very deep and profoundly emotional level. Indeed the initial and most formative attachments are to our parents. Parental attachments help shape all other attachments throughout our lives, and inform how we attach to other people or things, and ultimately how we are able to *detach* from other people and things. It is a large part why the stories of children taken from their parents and placed in residential schools in Canada are so tragic. Such an act of imposed detachment becomes very violent.

Healthy attachments allow for healthy *detachments*. We all need relationships or objects

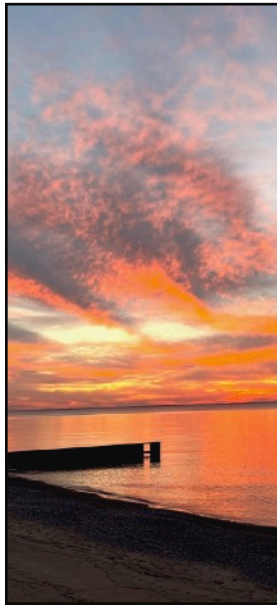
that create some stability for us; an anchor to regulate our lives.

So when Jesus says “whoever does not hate mother and father, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple,” it all seems a bit harsh. Indeed it goes right to the core of our most significant attachments, our familial bonds, and indeed our life.

Jesus makes this statement, and one regarding possessions at the end of today’s gospel reading, and inserts between them two stories. One story is about someone who is ridiculed for their inability to assess what is needed for a construction project. The second story is about a king humiliated for not assessing what resources are needed for a military operation. These stories are delivered as a hyperbole - an exaggeration - that suggests that *no one* would ever do this. No contractor would start a project without assessing the materials needed, and no king would enter battle without reviewing the resources needed for victory. These stories reveal the universal fear of not having enough. So, Jesus concludes, you know what is needed here: *give it all* up to follow me.

I wonder if Jesus is asking the large crowds following him *where their most defining attachment lies*. If attachments define us, shape us and form us, then perhaps Jesus is saying that if you want to follow me then the summary of the law becomes the most primary attachment. The very first text of scripture that a Jewish child learns is the great Shema, "*Hear, O Israel*" - love God and love your neighbour. It is the constant reminder, the perpetual calling, that God, like a potter with clay, shapes all of our other attachments. Jesus is saying that this divine connection, unlike any of the others, is eternal. As the psalmist says today, it has existed before you were born, and knows your inward parts.

To be known so intimately is what we long for but sometimes fear most. It is what our smart phone apps do: they trace the journeys of our loved ones, to know where they are: their sitting down and their rising up. It is what our texts and our calls are about. It is what a married couple who have been together for so long do: they



finish one another's thoughts before they are even spoken; they even begin to look like one another. All of this illustrates what we are attached to.

"You know my sitting down and my rising up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You trace my journeys and my resting places and are acquainted with all my ways. Indeed there is not a word on my lips, but you, O Lord, know it all together. You press upon me behind and before and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me." (Psalm 139)

The gift is that God has sacrificially offered God's very self as the ultimate attachment for us to fall into, to depend on, to be there when all other attachments fail us - which ultimately through death, we know they will. But in the meantime, healthy attachments are necessary to give us meaning and structure. So with care and humility we hold on to one another, those people and things that we love most, that shape us, and form us, recognizing that they are not eternal. They are a fleeting but effective preview and precursor to the greatest one to hold on to and be loved by for all time. Therein lies our hope and our freedom. Thanks be to God.