

**DETACHABLE**

***Sermon for Pentecost 16—Lk 25-33***

LPC, 9/8/13

When Rich and I had been married 15 or 20 years, I inadvertently washed the diamond from my engagement ring down the kitchen drain while I was peeling potatoes. The setting had somehow failed and by the time I realized this, the diamond was long gone.

It wasn't a very large diamond, but it was one of the very few I have ever owned, and it was, after all, a present from Rich. The stone had also been his grandmother's. In other words, regardless of its assessed value, my engagement diamond was irreplaceable.

Rich offered to replace it, but aside from the fact that at that point in our lives we could ill afford the expense, having *a* diamond wasn't the point. It was that particular diamond that was dear to me. Rich, however, was philosophical, and used the opportunity to turn my own words back on me. Very gently, he said, "Cynthia, you are always saying that people are more important than things. Now's your chance to show you believe what you say."

He was right.

We human beings do have a tendency to get attached to things. We also get attached to situations, and to people, and to ideas. This is not only natural, but to a great extent, good. Psychologically speaking, emotional detachment signifies dysfunction. But being attached has a price.

Our attachments may restrict our freedom. They may distract us from our responsibilities and even from our highest values. Our attachments may even become addictions. Or when situations change, or people go away, or ideas butt up against hard reality, we resist, we mourn, we generally have a hard time. When our various attachments come into conflict with one another, we suffer particularly, as for example when two people we love are at odds.

I believe this difficult lesson from the Gospel of Luke about hating your family is really about attachments of all sorts. Our families are, for the most part, our deepest attachments. Family therefore makes a perfect metaphor for our deepest attachments.

Furthermore, the troublesome language Jesus uses, of "hating" mother and father, does not have the association in the original language that it does in English. What helps me understand the concept behind the word translated "hate" in this passage is the Ignatian idea of "detachment."

Ignatian spirituality derives from St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit order. Ignatius was born Iñigo Lopez in the Basque region of northern Spain in 1491. Trained as a knight, he was gravely injured in battle. His convalescence from his injuries was protracted and painful.

Iñigo's dreams of military glory were as shattered as his right leg, and he became depressed. Daydreaming became his only relief. He asked for romances to read, to take his mind off his troubles. He was given, instead, religious tracts: *a Life of Christ* and *Lives of the Saints*. What he discovered was that he felt freer when daydreaming about holy things than about profane matters: both more alive and more at peace. Building on this discovery he created a system of spirituality that became known as the Ignatian method.

Part of the Ignatian method is this notion of detachment or disinterest. Now both of these words, like hate, also have negative connotations in modern English usage, but Margaret Silf, in her book *Inner Compass: An Invitation to Ignatian Spirituality* suggests that Ignatius' concept might be better described by the word "balance." But it also means prioritization of godly matters, and being able to place earthly matters within the perspective of God's eternal plan.

Balance, godly priorities and perspective are the essence of Ignatian detachment. Balance, priorities and context are the yardsticks against which we must measure our attachments, no matter how good and beautiful they are.

Balance is important. We are devoted to our family, but we have other relationships as well, and a calling to do God's work in the world. As followers of Jesus, we need balance.

Priorities are important. We take care of our possessions as best we can, but accidents do happen. Diamonds do get washed down the drain. And people are more important than things. As followers of Jesus, God is our priority.

Perspective is important. Of course we mourn the lost job. Of course we grieve for the loved one who has left this life for the next. But by the grace of God, and with help from his angels in human form, we heal and rededicate ourselves to life in faith, confident in God's larger plan to redeem the universe. As followers of Jesus we acknowledge heaven as our ultimate context.

Margaret Silf describes the Ignatian strategy for dealing with attachments in her book *Inner Compass*, which says in part:

I will not try to get rid [of my attachments.] Instead, I will use the limited energy I have to attend to those things in my experience where I feel right with God, or on solid ground, or living true. These will become the music in my heart that leads me into the dance and overrides the fear that keeps me clinging to the rails. I will not spend my energy trying to melt down my golden calf. Instead I will turn my attention to the holy mountain and my journey toward it, with all of God's surprises along the way. In this way God will lead me to freedom without my even realizing that it is happening.

In short, Jesus is not telling us to be hateful. Obviously. Jesus is just telling us to be, in the Ignatian sense, detachable, from everything except God.