

My preaching professor in seminary, Dr. Jeter, said it is usually not a good idea to begin a sermon with a joke. Most jokes that preachers tell have nothing at all to do with the actual message and run the risk of offending at least one person. Humor is okay in a sermon as long as it is natural and you have good timing. I generally agree with Dr. Jeter, but in this case I just couldn't resist! These may have nothing to do with the actual message and will probably offend someone, but I just have to tell you these jokes!

There was a man who went to Jerusalem with his wife and mother n' law. It was an exciting time for everyone. They finally had the opportunity to walk where Jesus walked and see all the wonderful places in the Holy Land. Unfortunately, the man's mother n' law died suddenly of a heart attack. The man and his wife didn't know what to do. After talking to a government official in Israel they learned they had two options: they could bury her in the Holy Land for \$150 or fly her back to the United States and bury her here. The man talked about it with his wife and made the comment: "I think it's pretty clear what we should do with your mother. We need to fly her back home and bury her in the United States." The man's wife replied, "But wouldn't it be nice to bury her here in the Holy Land among all the saints? And besides that, they would only charge us \$150!" The man answered, "Yes, I get your point, but remember, they buried a man here 2,000 years ago and he was resurrected three days later. I don't know if I'm willing to take the chance!"

I just couldn't resist. Since we are on the topic of mother n' law jokes, why not tell a couple more? There was a man who went to the visitation for his deceased mother n' law. He went into the funeral home and signed the guest book. Then he made his way into the viewing room to take one last look at his mother n' law. He walked up to the casket and immediately broke down in tears. His wife and some other members of his family were in the back and noticed he was struggling. His wife thought to herself, "Joe and my mother never got along. Why is he crying like that?" She made her way to the casket and put her arm around her husband to console him. She said, "It's going to be okay. It's going to be okay." Her husband pulled himself together and said, "I know. I know. I just thought I saw her move!"

Of course you know I'm kidding. I love my mother n' law and have even told her those jokes, and she didn't even kick me out of the house! She

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wasn't overly amused either, however. All of us have at least one thing in common – we all have families and like it or not, we did not have the opportunity to choose our families. To say that there is conflict in families would be an understatement. Even the families that seem to get along the best still have conflict. It's part of life. It's part of being in a family.

Think of all the potential conflicts within a family. One of the most common conflicts within families is that between siblings. "He's on my side of the car!" How many of you have heard that on vacation? "Why did she get a new car and all I got was this beat up 15 year-old car?" "Why does she get to stay out later than I did?" Then there is conflict between spouses. Imagine this conversation between a husband and wife: "Why can't you remember to take out the trash on Mondays? What is so difficult about that? And by the way, when did you decide to play golf this weekend? I thought we were going to the family reunion?" The husband responds, "Oh, how could I forget? I just love to sit and listen to your Uncle Jess talk my ear off about the good ole' days and how my generation is made up of a bunch of losers. You're right honey, I need to cancel that golf game and go pick up a bucket of chicken for the family reunion." The wife rolls her eyes and leaves the room. Isn't it fun being in a family?

One of the most common things that couples fight about is money. How many of you have had this discussion at the end of the month: "Honey, how much is left in our checking account?" "Let's see, \$3.49." "Three dollars and forty-nine cents? Where did it all go?" "Where did it all go? You are one to be asking that question. You know where it all went because you spent most of it." Then things get really ugly and we can't continue the conversation because this is a worship service!

There are countless things that families can be divided about – money, priorities, time, kids, etc. In our passage from Luke today you might be surprised to find that Jesus is someone who divides families. He said it himself: "Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law." I can understand families being divided over issues like money and who is sitting on whose side of the back seat, but

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being divided about Jesus? What is Jesus talking about here? How could Jesus be a lightning rod for conflict and division?

In his commentary on Luke's gospel Fred Craddock wrote: "As the gospel of John expressed it, Jesus is the crisis of the world (John 12:31). Crisis does not mean emergency but that moment or occasion of truth and decision about life. To be placed in the situation of decision is critical, for to turn to one person or goal or value means turning away from another. God is so acting toward the world in Jesus that a crisis is created, that is to say, 'Jesus is making a difference,' even within families. Peace in the sense of status quo is now disrupted."

I had never thought of the word "crisis" in those terms. I have always thought of a crisis as something terrible – a divorce, a sudden death, a car wreck, etc. But crisis simply means a moment of truth – a decision about life. If we understand the term "crisis" correctly then it is safe to say we have all experienced many crises throughout our lives -- those moments of truth where the rubber meets the road. For the sake of our discussion here let's define a crisis as a major life-changing decision. It is not a crisis when we decide between strawberry ice cream and vanilla ice cream at the grocery store. Nor is it a crisis when we are faced with the ultimate question of life, "Would you like paper or plastic?"

School is starting back next week and for some it will be their senior year in high school. All of those seniors will be facing a real crisis – a moment of truth. What do we do when we graduate? For some it will be deciding where to attend college. They will be asking themselves, "Do I go to A&M or Texas? Or what about Texas Tech? Then there is always Sam Houston and Stephen F. Austin. Should I go straight to a four-year university or should I stay here and go to Navarro for two years?" Then when they finally decide on a college they will be faced with another question: "What should I major in?"

For some of us we have been in the work world for years and our crisis today is deciding whether or not to go into another profession or line of work altogether. I sold industrial scales (floor scales, counting scales, truck scales, etc.) after I graduated from college. I did well at the job and could have made a good career out of marketing scales in the DFW area. I liked my job as far as jobs are concerned. The hours were good and the pay wasn't bad either. I even had dental on the health insurance plan. What

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more could a guy ask for? Well, then a funny thing happened. Just when I thought I had it all figured out and that my life's course was set, Jesus stuck his nose in my business. I was driving home one day from work on I-30 in Arlington. I had just passed Six Flags when it dawned on me. I asked myself this question, or should I say God asked the question, "Is this what you want to do with the rest of your life?" I had sold an \$80,000 scale system earlier in the day and to be perfectly honest with you, I didn't care. I was more interested in getting home and attending the Disciple Bible study class that Alisha and I were taking together at a Methodist church in Arlington.

I faced a definite crisis. To say that it was a moment of truth would be an understatement. On the one hand, I had a secure Monday through Friday job and was in the process of building a house in Fort Worth. But on the other, I was burning inside to do what I believed God was calling me to do. So I made the decision – I was going to seminary and would become a pastor. I got all kinds of advice from friends and family. Not surprisingly, some of the advice was not all that supportive of my decision. I heard things like: "Don't do it." "Are you sure about this? Do you really know what you are getting yourself into?" "If there is anything else you can do, do it." "Don't become a pastor." The people who said those things to me were level-headed people whom I loved and respected, but I faced a moment of truth where I had to answer not to them, but to God. I chose God and that has made all the difference in my life.

Since then I have come to understand and appreciate the concept that when we say yes to Jesus we say no to other things and yes, even other people – sometimes even family. Now I am not suggesting that to be a disciple of Jesus we must disown our friends and family. On the contrary, when we take seriously following Jesus and his commands, we become less selfish and therefore, become better spouses, fathers, mothers, friends, etc. With that being said, however, there are those "crisis" moments when we truly must decide between Jesus and something or someone else. For Jesus, the decision is clear. He is above all else – period. In Matthew he said, "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

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There was a rich young man who learned this lesson the hard way. He came to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" Jesus replied, "Why do you ask me what is good? There is only one who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." The rich young man asked, "Which ones?" Jesus then listed several of the Ten Commandments and the rich young man stated that he had followed all of those and asked Jesus what he still lacked. Jesus, knowing that what really kept this man from following and giving his all was his possessions, said, "Go sell your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." The crisis moment had been defined and set before the rich young man. What would he do? He walked away from Jesus because he had many possessions and those were more important to him than Jesus.

I sometimes wonder what it is I do every Sunday morning about this time. You sit there and listen to me read a scripture and talk about it. They call it preaching and people that do what I do "preachers". Some people think preachers tell people what to do and how to think and believe and behave. The more I think about, however, preaching is not so much "good advice" or a glorified "Dear Abby" column, but a time in which crises are created – moments of truth where decisions must be made.

The great poet Robert Frost put it this way in his famous poem "The Road Not Taken":

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!

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Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

I'm not going to tell you what to do with your life. I would be a poor preacher if I did that. But I will tell you this. One day I chose to follow Jesus and it has made all the difference in my life, and I offer him to you today. Some people call it an invitation but I call it a crisis?