

## Use Your Brain

One day, Colleen came home after attending her college classes. Her mother noticed that she was much more excited than usual and asked how her day was. Colleen said that her philosophy class had a guest lecturer who told them about a different way of approaching life and each other. Instead of being in a 'dog-eat-dog' rat race for 40 years after graduation, this lecturer talked about how to help one another, support each other and talked of relying on each other to get things done. Her mom asked where this lecturer was from and Colleen said that he just roams around the country giving lectures and posting blogs on the internet. Then Colleen drops the bombshell that she is going to drop out of college and follow this guy around. By then her dad came home from work and Colleen told him all about her new plans. Her mom said that it sounded too much like a cult where the leader keeps everyone under their control and separated from their family. Her dad asked if Colleen was willing to throw away her full scholarship that she worked so hard to get. Colleen said that it didn't matter, she wasn't really into school and was thinking that it was just a waste of her time right now and was considering dropping out anyways. She said she can always go back to school once she figures out what she really wants to do with her life. Her parents reminded her that it isn't so easy to leave a cult like that. Once the leader gets you to join, then it is nearly impossible to get out. They reminded her of what happened to the Jimmy Jones and David Koresh cults and how everyone wound up dying. Colleen said that this leader wasn't like that. She said that he even said that he wanted them to think for themselves and to ask questions. She finally said that her mind was made up and she was going to do this regardless of what her parents said. Her dad yelled that if she goes off and quits college and joins this guy, then she might as well as not come home anymore, because they would have nothing further to do

with her. After packing as much of her clothes and things that she could fit in her car, she left the house, slamming the door as hard as she could.

If one were to take an objective view at Jesus, what He taught and what He was asking His followers to do, you could come to the conclusion that He is just another one of those egotistical know-it-alls who thinks that they are better than anyone else and that they have all the answers to life. You might even go so far as to call it a cult, because what Jesus is saying goes against the traditional ways of doing things in so many ways. Except for establishing a commune that is apart from society as much as possible, it does seem like this offshoot of the Jewish religion is very cult-like. Despite all the 'warning signs' that Jesus is establishing a cult, there are some very important differences between Jesus and others who have a 'god complex.'

One of the major differences can be seen in today's Gospel reading. After wrapping up His talk with the apostles in the first part of the Gospel text, Jesus then turns to the crowds and addresses them. He is basically saying that you have brains, use them. You already know how to interpret the signs in nature, use the other signs that you see and think of what they mean. He says that we know that when the day is hazy, hot and humid, then there will be a good chance of a rainstorm somewhere in the area later in the day as it cools off. So it is with other signs. One of the main differences between a cult leader and Jesus is that Jesus does not make Himself to be the one with all the knowledge and dispenses that knowledge to whom and when He sees fit. A cult leader will only tell the followers what the leader thinks they should know and the followers are to blindly obey. Jesus tells us that being created in God's image, we have the ability to think and make conclusions based on what we observe. Another difference is that Jesus

does not make Himself to be the ultimate authority. Cult leaders will hold all the power and authority over the group. While we acknowledge that Jesus is the head of the church, when we look at the Gospels, we see that Jesus always points to one who is greater than he is. Instead of taking credit for the miracles that He does, Jesus points to someone greater and says that it because of the Father that He is able to do what He does. Yes, Jesus is aware of His divine nature and His 'real' status within the universe, but He does not make it 'all about me.' He looks outward towards others and sees what He can give them, what they need. So, while on first glance it could be argued that Christianity is nothing more than a cult, when we look closer, it is not a cult, rather it is trying to emulate the way that our Creator wants us to live with each other and for each other.

In looking at the first part of the text where Jesus is still talking with the disciples, we see a different side of Jesus. We don't see the peaceful Jesus carrying a lamb across His shoulders or interacting with children with a smile on His face. We see a Jesus who can seem harsh, who seems like He is looking to cause dissension among people, especially families. However, as we have seen, we need to dig a little deeper into what Jesus is saying. On one level, Jesus is being predictive of how people will view Him. Like our little story at the beginning of this sermon, Jesus will cause families to split because of those who wish to follow a new way and those who want to keep with the traditions, with the ways that have always been done. But on another level, Jesus is just being descriptive of how people are. He realizes that not everyone will believe Him, not put their trust in Him. There will be people who, like the apostles, will drop everything and follow Him. Others, like Nicodemus, will be skeptical and have a longer journey to trusting in Jesus. Others, like many of the chief priests, will never believe in Him and will prefer to stay doing things the way they had been doing them. Jesus

recognizes this and cautions the apostles not to be thinking that everyone will just suddenly change and become believers.

This chapter began with Luke mentioning that the crowds were in the tens of thousands that were following Jesus and the apostles. After some discussion with the crowds concluding with the story about rich man and his barns, most of the rest of the chapter Jesus is talking to the disciples. In today's reading, Jesus is telling them that it will not always be where there are tens of thousands following them. In some ways, what Jesus is teaching seems too easy, too simple; but in other ways it is harder than anything we have done before because it goes against everything that we have done before. Earlier in the chapter, Jesus tells the disciples that we need to trust in God just as the birds do and the lilies of the field. While it sounds easy, it does go against our sinful nature of wanting to be in control of everything. Jesus cautions us that because of this there will be divisions among us, some believing in Him while others do not. However, from the whole Gospel message we see that at His full reign, there will be peace, that He will be the Prince of Peace. Until that time, Jesus wants us to use our brains and interpret the signs for ourselves, not relying on others who have their own agenda.

#### YouTube links

Gospel and Sermon: <https://youtu.be/ozc5xf-W4gc>

Service: <https://youtu.be/q3L6OjvI274>