

*Second Sunday after Trinity*

**FOLLOWING JESUS**

*Today's service continues the theme of discipleship from last week, focussing on the cost of following Jesus.*

INVOCATION

+ In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen

The Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.

We lift up our hearts in thanks and praise:

**Glory to you, O God!**

PRAISE

O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness!  
Bow down before him, his glory proclaim;  
with gold of obedience, and incense of lowliness,  
kneel and adore him: the Lord is his Name!

Low at his feet lay thy burden of carefulness,  
high on his heart he will bear it for thee,  
and comfort thy sorrows, and answer thy prayerfulness,  
guiding thy steps as may best for thee be.

Fear not to enter his courts in the slenderness  
of the poor wealth thou wouldst reckon as thine;  
for truth in its beauty, and love in its tenderness,  
these are the offerings to lay on his shrine.

These, though we bring them in trembling and fearfulness,  
he will accept for the Name that is dear;  
mornings of joy give for evenings of tearfulness,  
trust for our trembling and hope for our fear.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Almighty God,  
to whom all hearts are open,  
all desires known,  
and from whom no secrets are hidden:  
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts  
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,  
that we may perfectly love you,  
and worthily magnify your holy name;  
through Christ our Lord. Amen.

*As we come before God asking him to cleanse our hearts that we may worship and follow him in Spirit and in truth. In a time of silence reflect on your life in the last week, asking God to amend what is wrong, and to affirm what is good.*

*Then say:*

You were sent to heal the contrite:  
Father, have mercy.

You came to call sinners:  
Christ, have mercy.

You plead for us at the right hand of the Father:  
Lord, have mercy.

Almighty God have mercy upon me, forgive me my sins,  
and keep me in eternal life. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE DAY

Faithful God,  
whose mercy never fails:  
deepen our faithfulness to you  
and to your living Word,  
Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

READINGS

*Read: Jeremiah 20.7-13*

*Jeremiah felt the anguish of his calling to be a prophet. He feels the overwhelming power of God's call to him: God enticed him, and he was enticed; but he feels equally the personal cost of his calling as people mock him and turn away from him. Yet he will not forsake the LORD.*

*Verses from Psalm 69*

It is for you that I suffer taunts,  
that shame has covered my face.  
To my own kin I have become an outcast,  
a stranger to the children of my mother.

Zeal for your house consumes me,  
and taunts against you fall on me.  
When my soul wept bitterly in fasting,  
they made it a taunt against me.

When I made my clothing sackcloth,  
I became a reproach to them,  
the gossip of those at the gates,  
the theme of drunkards' songs.

But I pray to you, O LORD,  
for a time of your favour.  
In your great mercy, answer me, O God,  
with your salvation that never fails.

ALLELUIA

Alleluia, alleluia!  
Your words are spirit, Lord, and they are life.  
Alleluia!

*Read: MATTHEW 9.35 - 10.8*

REFLECTION

Some years ago Helen and I visited Tucson in Arizona where Helen was attending a conference. Our drive to the Convention Centre in downtown Tucson was mostly along Campbell Avenue, one of the major north-south roads in the city. On either side there are various business, fast food outlets, and churches. At one junction there was a money lender; outside the billboard said: *HAPPINESS IS A POSITIVE CASH FLOW.*

A few blocks further down there was a Baptist Church. Outside the billboard said: *HAPPINESS IS SUBMISSION TO GOD'S WILL.*

Every morning on our short drive we were reminded of the radical choice that being a Christian involves. Jesus said it straight: 'No servant can be the slave of two masters... You cannot serve God and Money'? (*Luke 16.13*)

The choice which those two billboards presented is basically between doing what I want - after all, that is the freedom which money gives - and doing what God wants. And that is the choice that lies at the heart of following Jesus: what comes first, God or me?

Doing what God wants is often resisted because somehow we feel that he wants us to be a different person, to stop being who we are naturally, and become some sort of religious stereotype. But that cannot be the case. If we believe that God made us, we must also believe that he gave us those talents, attributes and abilities which make us uniquely who we are. That being so, we cannot also believe that God wants us as Christians to disown our individuality and to become someone entirely different. What God wants is for us to grow fully into the gifts and character he gave us, and he wants us to use our gifts and personality to help make his world a better place. Now this may well mean a change of priorities in our lives - using our God-given gifts to a different end, and to that extent, it is true, God wants us to become a different person.

Another way of putting it is that he wants us to help build his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. We have to start with ourselves: the kingdom is within us, as Jesus said. The choice is really about becoming truly who we are or remaining as a pale shadow of the real me.

This may not sound much like a radical choice, but it is. Anyone who has tried to be true to themselves will know how hard that can be. Jeremiah knew that to be true to himself, he had to follow his call to be a prophet, but it brought him pain and ridicule. Virtue and being true to ourselves don't come easily; they have to be learned. In his letter to the Galatians, St Paul lists the common temptations that drag us down: impurity, idolatry, enmities, jealousy, factions... , and he says we must 'crucify' them if we want to be as God made us to become (*Gal 5.19-25*). 'Crucify' is pretty strong language! Becoming truly ourselves is hard work.

Learning to be a follower of Jesus is part of becoming truly ourselves, and he spoke in graphic terms about the hard choices that following him might involve, as, for example, in things today's Gospel reading where he warns of family conflict. Can the one we celebrate as the 'Prince of peace' have really said: 'I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.' (*Matthew 10.34*) And what are we to make of his very disturbing statement that he has come to set one member of a family against another? It is, I think, a way of making plain just how much being faithful to Christ cuts across the way we live our lives when we let the ways of the world shape the path of our life. Jesus speaks in the graphic idiom of the Middle East rather than the restrained idiom of the British, but he does not want those who are attracted to his way to be in any doubt about the cost. 'Not everyone will accept the way to peace that I bring,' he says. 'Many will reject it, and division is bound to follow, even within your own families.'

Following Jesus is a radical, single-minded choice on which there is no going back. But it's worth it, because following him is the way to receive the gifts of his spirit, the gifts we need to become truly ourselves. Even those who have counted themselves as followers of

Jesus for many years, may need to re-assess the quality of their discipleship. Archbishop Michael Ramsay, spoke to them in a mission to the University of Oxford in 1960. He said:

‘There are those who have been Christians in the past. But now the realisation has come that to be a Christian does not mean being “on the side of” Christianity like one who supports a movement or approves of a cause. It means submission of the self to Christ, and the sharing in the life of his family.’

*(Arthur Michael Ramsay, Introducing the Christian Faith, p. 91)*

Submission is an unattractive word. We might feel more comfortable with aligning ourselves with God’s will, or simply with seeking God’s will. Both these things are good, but they can mislead us into thinking that no great effort is required. As so often the good becomes the enemy of the best. Anyone who has tried to realise their gifts to the full knows that it requires discipline and sacrifice – as those who have achieved proficiency as musicians, craftsmen, surgeons, parents ... will know.

The money lender on Campbell Avenue tempted us with the idea that we can have what we want without cost. It’s a seductive enticement, but it is a piece of wickedness – just like the Visa TV advert: *DON’T PUT IT OFF, PUT IT ON!* We all know there is no such thing as a free lunch; equally there is no such thing as growth without cost. Encouraging us to get into debt is not the way to crucify the lower nature. Debt brings not only a loss of freedom, but in its wake come strife, envy, anger, quarrels, drunkenness – the very things that take us away from God, and away from becoming truly ourselves.

Jesus said our true self is the only thing worth having:

‘What does a man gain by winning the whole world at the cost of his true self? What can he give to buy that self back?’

*(Mark 8.36,37)*

The cost of discipleship may be high, but the rewards are great. Maybe in our desire for an undemanding discipleship we overlook the economics of the Gospel. Even the kingdom has its price. The man who found the buried treasure in the field sold all that he had in order to buy the field. The merchant looking for fine pearls sold all that he had in order to buy the one which outshone all others. To obtain the best we cannot remain satisfied with the good. The radical choice has to be made if we want to find the kingdom within us.

In the end though, for most of us it is probably not going to be our love of money which is going to get in the way, but things much nearer to home. As Jesus made his last journey to Jerusalem three would-be disciples came up to him. Jesus warned them to count the cost of discipleship. He told the first that he must forsake the comfort of his home: 'Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.' He told the second that he must be prepared for conflict with his family: 'Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.' He said to the third, who wanted time to say 'goodbye', that there was no time for fond farewells: 'No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.' (*Luke 9.57-end*)

These are hard sayings. But many of us have been there: parental pressure to get a solid job and a good income... to settle down... at work to go along with the corporate ethos... These things are good, but, says Jesus, even so, they must not become substitutes for doing God's will. George Caird put it well:

'A man must be prepared to sacrifice security, duty and affection, if he is to respond to the call of the kingdom, a call so urgent and imperative that all other loyalties must give way before it. The most difficult choices in life are not between the good and the evil, but between the good and the best.'

(*G. B. Caird, The Gospel of St Luke, p. 141*)

*Pause and reflect.*

PRAYERS

*A time of free prayer and intercession. You may like to begin with this hymn:*

O Jesus, I have promised  
to serve Thee to the end;  
Be Thou forever near me,  
my Master and my Friend;

I shall not fear the battle  
if Thou art by my side,  
Nor wander from the pathway  
if Thou wilt be my Guide.

*Then use the traditional five-fold pattern:*

For the Church

For the World

For family, friends, neighbours and the local community

For the sick and all in need, near and far

For those who have died

*At the end:*

Merciful Father, accept my prayers,  
for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

CONCLUSION

Our Father...  
The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
The love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,  
be with us all, now and for ever.  
Amen.