

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST 8.9 2019 Luke 14.25-33

Large crowds of wannabee disciples had joined Jesus on the road to Jerusalem, a city where past prophets had died. He, too, would there face rejection, suffering and death. To ensure these would-be disciples were sincere in their intent to carry out the will of God, he had to disabuse them that his way of love with a cross on his back, would become an attractive victory march to celebrity, wealth, applause and social position. In no uncertain terms, he had to weed out the mere camp-followers and hangers-on by spelling out his stringent selection criteria. To become risk-takers for the weak and the vulnerable, Jesus' disciples must be ready to sacrifice the dearest things in life by utter self-renunciation.

Jesus chose to lay bare the truth, by using exaggerated language as a preaching technique. Loving Jesus could not preach hate. Yet, he threatened "Whoever does not ***hate*** father and mother cannot be my disciple." Here, "hate" meant "loving less than" or "to prefer above," or "putting in second place." In Genesis 29, Jacob loved his as yet infertile Rachel, but "hated" second wife Leah. "Hated?" How could he possibly "hate" the loving mother of four of his sons?

When it came to meeting human needs, Jesus meant we must choose to put compassion for one's cherished family below that for the most vulnerable ones, the marginalized poor and the diseased. It was a call to repeat again and again the story of the Good Samaritan. The Samaritan expanded the boundaries of neighbourly love, to a risk-taking love, to offer a mercy-extending love, a love that transcended religious affiliation and race. At a first hearing, Jesus' teaching sounded frightening and uncompromising.

'Take up your cross,' the Saviour said, 'if you would my disciple be.' We are called daily to follow in Christ's way to take up our crosses, mental, physical, spiritual. We are called to share the cross of Christ the Redeemer, who walks beside us to help us against the natural temptation to give in to competing loyalties, by laying down the cross. To take up one's cross is to favour the marginalized whom the world generally overlooks. This will be costly. Jesus knew the cost well; angrily upset people had once hurried him from his synagogue sermon to throw him over a nearby cliff.

Recently, a commercial radio station invited listeners to call in "You're on the air. What's the first thing you said when you rolled out of bed this morning?" One caller: "What's that smell, Darl? Didn't you put the dog out last night?" Then came another caller with a slight accent: "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart..." The shock jock could not handle the *Jewish holiness prayer* and mumbled "Oh? You go to church? Sorry, wrong number." And cut to a commercial break.

Jesus then spoke two small parables. He compared choosing to become a disciple to building a produce storage tower. That is, before putting hand to the religious life, a novice must first consider one's resolve and strength of commitment and ask whether one was willing to sacrifice everything for the cause? Similarly, if a landowner did not first estimate had he sufficient available funds and began building his tower, he might discover that cost over-runs meant that he could not finish the project. Then, the half-built folly would be a monument to his incompetency and short-sightedness. Sixty years ago, when I was about to become a

disciple, my parish priest advised “You won’t last six weeks. Don’t tell anyone that you’re going. Just disappear quietly. If you trumpet your going, your friends will dine out on your failure when you return.”

Jesus’ second parable compared the call to discipleship to a summons to do battle. If a king, with his diminutive army, found that he was facing an overwhelming enemy force, and wished to remain a smart survivor, the wise course to avoid a catastrophe, would be to negotiate a truce before battle began.

What was Jesus’ point here? As the priest tried to warn me so long ago, Jesus warns us not to rush headlong into an instant choice over all other competing loyalties, without first prayerfully seeking a full awareness of the cost. While society encourages greed over giving, and hoarding over sharing, and abundance as a marker of social status, to be a far-sighted disciple means to clear the decks of all intrusive possessions. True discipleship means having no security other than total commitment to Jesus alone. This discipleship is not cheap; it is courageous and it is costly. There can be no cowards in his kingdom.

Jesus was a crucified king who, from his cross-throne, forgave the very people who secured his death. He was a king who granted salvation to the condemned criminal hanging next to him. I am thinking of a Tamil family spitefully condemned because Jesus is no king recognizable in Australian society today. Our society acquiesces to a leadership that little reflects his holy Bible teaching and his Christian principles. But the truth of the Gospel will outlive long after these leaders are gone. Do we stand up for the type of the very person that you, Brother Jesus, sought to save? Do we believe that our word will make no difference, so we let hatred have its dominant voice? Worse, do we believe the bullying blockheads?

Possibly, Jesus knew nothing of the man hanging with him, other than he was repentant and sought a heavenly home. Could he have formerly been a would-be refugee with a wife and two babies to whom you freely granted a Paradise? Do we see the real worth of every single human being, and thus the rejection of a persecuted family as a denial of humanity and its right to exist?

Jesus was a king committed to solidarity with the sufferer next to him on Mount Calvary’s tree. That fellow sufferer died knowing that he would be welcomed safe home to heaven. Leonard Cohen used croak “There is a crack in everything. That is how the light gets in.” As we carry our daily cross and follow our thorn-crowned Saviour, may we be the light to expose any crack to shine a glimmer of hope in the steel-walled ships that turn people back from our shores.