

"None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all of your possessions,"

Jesus tells a large crowd.

"Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."

If those two warnings aren't dire enough, he issues a third :

"Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even life itself, cannot be my disciple."

You have to hand it to Jesus: he doesn't sugarcoat his message in order to sell it. He doesn't even try to soften the blow. He tells it like it is.

So, how is it?

It's like this: if we want to follow Jesus, we have to relinquish once and for all the fantasy that everything we do - every choice we make, every tribalism we cherish, every idol we worship, every possession we hoard - affects everything.

There is only "we" - a holy, God-ordained "we," more inclusive, enormous, consequential, and fragile than we can possibly wrap our heads around.

When we become a disciple, we are responsible for that "we," whether we want to be or not. Jesus's claim on our life is radical and absolute.

To say this teaching is hard is a laughable understatement.

God is very clear what is expected from Jesus. And Jesus is very clear what is expected from us. And uses the strong extreme language of the day, to express that. As in English, the language Jesus spoke had its particular sayings which were never meant to be taken literally. As in English -slept like a baby. As easy as pie. It's raining cats and dogs. Drop me a line. Give me a ring. Call me sometime. Pull someone's leg. I'd just die.

Sayings which were never meant to be taken literally.

The language of loving and hating used by Jesus in today's Gospel reflects a Semitic expression of stating preference. Semitic languages by and large have no word for 'prefer.' When a person prefers one thing over another he or she is said to 'love' the thing preferred and 'hate' the other.

While it is wrong to water down the strength of Jesus' prophetic utterance, what he is saying, is that family allegiances, which were so strong in the Palestinian culture of Jesus, have to take second place as far as following him is concerned.

We are to love him in preference to loving anyone / anything else. We can love our mum, our dad, our sister, brother, children, partner, wife, husband but not as we love God. And for some that is hard to hear ... then and now.

Great crowds accompanied Jesus on his way. Some came seeking wisdom and answers. Some were hoping for healing, and others came with political dreams rekindling. Jesus, who reads hearts, was not taken in by the size of the crowd. Rather than be flattered or proud, he turns to them with a warning. He warns the crowd of the cost following him demands.

As Martin Luther stated

A religion that gives nothing, costs nothing, and suffers nothing,
is worth nothing.

Jesus is telling us our religion is worth something, and may cost everything. Jesus tells the crowd that this is no game. He wants disciples for life, not spectators for awhile. If you are here to see what's going on, sitting back watching, giving a mark on the activities and teachings, with no commitment of heart, time or talent, be on your way. Spectators cheer hosanna one day and yell crucify the next. Jesus has enough spectators, and never enough disciples.

Jesus gives two little parables to take the crowd beyond abstractly considering discipleship. These parables are to make the crowd, and us, consider questions of readiness and risk. Don't go any further in any thought of following me, in carrying that cross, Jesus is saying, unless you have considered whether you are able, whether you have what it takes and what it takes is Jesus.

Jesus is asking us to consider the cost of following him. Jesus knows the cost. He is living it. The only question is whether we can.

As with the tower builder. And the king. If you are going to be overwhelmed by the forces you may come up against – don't start. Don't be my disciple. Because you won't be able to!

There is a need to assess your resources and evaluate your resolve. Don't sign up under the flush of inspiration or in secret pursuit of anything other than the cross. A decision needs to be made with all the practical wisdom of a cost-conscious builder and a battle hardened king.

And in our decision we are to be salt. Now although we live in a salt fearing world, with many a salt free diet, Jesus is referring to the kind of salt Elisha added to the water of Jericho and it became wholesome where neither death nor miscarriage would come from it. This is the salt we are, the kind which brings forth new life, full life.

Salt is a basic element, a mineral which our world is made up of, and which physically we rely upon. We are to live what we are we made up of, what we rely on. We are made up of God. We can rely on God.

And then my friends, with just a sprinkling of us the world tastes a better place. With a sprinkle of us in the world, in your home, this church, and the full flavour of God is known, can be tasted.

Wendy