

Sunday 8 September 2013

Jeremiah 18:1-11; Philemon 1-20; Luke 14:25-33

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What price discipleship.

Whoever comes to me and does not hate father, mother, wife, children, brother, sister, even life, cannot be my disciple. Really???? And then, none can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions. Well, you can see the mass exodus can't you. I mean, is he for real???, just what was Jesus thinking. This is not the best example of how to win friends and influence people.

But Jesus is not trying to win friends, even if he is trying to influence people. Jesus is simply trying to warn all those followers of the cost of discipleship. This is not an easy road; this is not something to be undertaken lightly, without serious thought. And yes, it is true that the word we see translated as hate does not mean hate as we understand it today. Jesus is not really asking people to hate their relatives and family, just warning them that the cost of discipleship is that they have to let go of their attachment to them, that family can no longer be their first priority. That, in following Jesus, they are asked to be prepared to sacrifice their family and possessions, their attachments to all that society holds dear, they are asked to leave it all behind and give all importance in their lives to God. Jesus is warning all those following him that if they wish to continue to follow him, they need to mean it, they need to be serious about it. Jesus makes it very clear just how hard following him will be. If you wish to be my follower, you must be prepared to carry your cross. You must be prepared to suffer for what you believe. You must be prepared to be ridiculed, to be ostracised, to be outcast, to be persecuted.....

What about us? Are we willing to be outcast, ostracised for what we believe, or would we like to keep our beliefs personal, yes we strongly believe in God and all that that entails, but we will keep it quiet, won't let it affect our public profile. Kevin Rudd isn't ashamed or embarrassed for it to be known he is a Christian, and yes he has copped some flak over how some of his policies and statements are seen in the light of his Christianity. For some determined to undermine God, they argue that he is making soft decisions because he is a Christian, that his Christianity makes him unable to make the hard political decisions, other times Christians may have wondered how he could make the decision he does because it seems out of line with a Christian point of view. It seems he is damned if he does and damned if he doesn't, but he has not shied away from it. Other politicians too have not been afraid to have it known that God is important for them too. It has left many at risk of being called hypocritical, it has left the whole Christian community at risk of being accused of hypocrisy, but we should not be afraid to allow those we encounter in our lives know who we are and whose we are. A Christian who does not publically affirm their beliefs by their words and actions; a Christian who shows enthusiasm without commitment; is as useless as salt which is no longer salty. And Jesus warns us that when this happens, in the same way as non salty salt is thrown out, we too will be tossed away.

Those in the crowd with Jesus were made very aware of the cost of following him. Jesus uses two practical illustrations, no one starts building without first knowing they have enough money to finish, and no one wages war without first knowing they have an army strong enough to win. To do either of these things would be ludicrous, you would end up with a partially completed building which is useless to you, and become the laughing stock of those around you, or in the other scenario you would be defeated and taken captive or worse, killed, by the person against whom you have waged war. This cost of discipleship was close to Jesus, he knew the cost, and did not shirk from ultimately paying that cost. What about us? Why are we in the crowd which is following Jesus today? What are we looking for while following Jesus? Are we willing to pay the cost of remaining there, or are we just spectators, following along for the show, just 'caught up' in the slipstream of life without really thinking about what we are doing or why we are doing it? If someone asked me why I am doing what I am doing, would I be able to give them an answer which truly reflected who God is for me? I hope so. God is standing there every day ready to transform my life, your life. God is speaking to us every day, warning us against casual following, warning us against just following the crowd, inviting us into fellowship and inviting us to commit ourselves to truly walk purposefully with God. Our reading from Jeremiah spoke about the potter and clay. Just as the potter molds and remolds the clay into the desired vessel, so God molds and remolds us into the people we become.

Soren Kierkegaard once said, what Jesus wants is followers not admirers. Unless we are willing to allow ourselves to be changed to be molded, all we are doing is admiring Jesus for the person he was, without any commitment to allow that person to infiltrate the person I am.

If you have ever been to an auction, the golden rule (apart from don't scratch your nose at the wrong time) is always know your upper limit. Always know how high a price you are willing to pay. Jesus is telling us that today, but he is also warning us that the asking price is very high. Today we are being asked, 'how high are you willing to go', how does your upper limit compare to the price required to be a follower of Jesus.

Those following Jesus knew what he meant by carrying your cross, they had seen the public shame and humiliation of criminals as they were forced to carry their own cross for execution, but these people following Jesus had also heard him earlier declare that God's kingdom was at hand. Some of them were expecting celebrations and peace and prosperity. But Jesus was telling them, in sentiments echoed by Dwight Eisenhower "there will be no victories at bargain basement prices". Jesus is telling those following him that if they are looking for cheap tickets to glory, they won't find them with him. To follow Jesus is to enter a life of difficulty, a life of suffering. Thomas À Kempis in his *Imitation of Christ* writes that "Many come following Jesus who love his heavenly kingdom but few come looking forward to suffering. Many admire His miracles but few follow Him in humiliation to the cross." Discipleship is demanding. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, wrote from a Nazi prison just before he went to the gallows for following Jesus, "When Christ calls a man, He bids him, 'Come and die!'". Last week we remembered the martyrs of New Guinea, we are surrounded by people who have lost their lives in their following of God. Every day is demanding, Bonhoeffer knew that. When Jesus said that those who follow him have to be prepared to

give up everything, he was calling his disciples to recognize that discipleship does not come cheaply.

The question before us today and every day is, are we willing to pay the price. Is our maximum price high enough for us to follow Jesus, are we willing to give up all we have so that we may have what we cannot lose. Are we willing to be molded and remolded into discipleship for God. Following Jesus is not easy, but God's word is still the best news we have heard and the best news we will ever hear. Discipleship is demanding, discipleship is delightful, discipleship takes determination. If you are willing to follow him, come with all you are, and with all you have.