

## Trinity XII Year C 2019 (P18/OT23)

Are you still glad that you came to church this Sunday after hearing that Gospel reading? It would be a cheap jibe to ally the words of Jesus to our current political situation, where even brothers are divided over the great issue of the day. The words of Moses in the passage from Deuteronomy also seem to offer a very stark choice in the way we are called to approach our journey of faith: life and prosperity, death and adversity. Is this what faith is actually about? We all know that religion divides, and that many of the great turmoils in history centre around matters of faith. They do today. So is it better just to forget religion and just do what we can to make the world a better place?

I think not. Even as a member of the clergy who sometimes wrestles with the institutional church myself, I think not! Our Faith is the greatest treasure for humanity, the pearl beyond price. So let's unpack the words of Jesus to see where we are led in understanding.

Perhaps to begin with, we should note the way in which throughout this Gospel, Luke has portrayed the way in which the journey of Jesus is one displaying an extraordinary hospitality on his part, most particularly to the marginalized and those beyond the pale of the norms of society of the day. There is a real sense that on every occasion, the guest - **Jesus** - becomes the one who ends up explaining and displaying a far more radical hospitality than that of his hosts, revealed at the tables of Pharisees as well as sinners. No one is beyond the pale in being drawn into understanding the depth of God's extraordinary hospitality through which Jesus challenges social and religious norms at every turn.

As I said last week, the words of the Magnificat at the start of the Gospel give us a radical manifesto of the way in which faith in Jesus should always cause us to look at our dealings with the world. There is a real sense that new life is brought about through faith in him, and in allowing the Holy Spirit to lead us on a journey of continual transformation within our faith journey.

As we seek to understand what Jesus is talking about, firstly we need to remember that he (in the words of Luke) has resolutely set his face towards Jerusalem (*Luke 9: 51*), where ultimately the fulness of God's love for each of us will be revealed through Passion, Death and Resurrection. Immediately before this passage, Jesus has just spoken of a great banquet where many of those invited have found feeble excuses to stay away. The owner of the house angrily calls his slave to invite the poor, the crippled the blind and the lame to eat; and when even this doesn't result in a full house tells the slave to **compel** those in the roads and lanes to come, *'for not one of those who were invited will taste my dinner.'* (*Luke 14: 24*) The banquet is, of course, about living the fulness of the Gospel or Kingdom life, and Jesus is challenging those in positions of religious and social power. They refuse to be open to the transformation of interacting with the world through self-giving love. This invitation to the banquet is as much for you and me as it was them. We are called to know and reveal the fulness of life to be found in the way we touch the world in faithfulness.

Now Jesus turns to the large crowds who follow him with uncompromising words which talk of division. They have been drawn to this powerful preacher who has healed and spoken of the life of the Kingdom in a way which has drawn them in ever greater numbers.

However, the stark words that Jesus utters about hating even family members for the sake of the Gospel are the most extreme we find within Luke's Gospel. Even allowing for Biblical scholars talking of Jesus's use of the Semitic love of exaggeration, we feel profoundly uncomfortable with such words. Yet I think that they must be balanced by two things. One is the reference to the Cross – *'Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.'* (v.27). The knowledge of the fulness of Kingdom life can only be brought about and understood through Calvary and all that flows from it. Secondly, the starkness of these words calls us to let nothing become a barrier in offering the Kingdom life to others.

This passage took me back to John's Gospel (*Chapter 6*) when Jesus declared, *'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.'* You may remember that he then seems to spoil this beautiful imagery with unpalatable language: *'Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.'* Indeed, the message is even stronger - the Greek word used for eating implies chewing. It's another way to challenge us to know how difficult aspects of this Kingdom life will be. John tells us that the Lord's followers questioned such hard teaching, and that *'From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.'* (*John 6: 26*) In fact both Luke and John point to our call to fully engage within the world in order to call people to the fullness of life found in Jesus, and this will sometimes lead us into conflict. Yet we have the answer to broken humanity's problems. In John 6 as people turn away, Jesus asks the twelve, *'You do not want to leave too?'* and Simon Peter answers, *"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.'* (*Jn 6: 67-69*) This answer is ours too.

Following Jesus is a serious business. What life in him means is not some glorified old life, however comfortable, which I think is probably what the crowds expected. It is a radical call to serve the world in his love without any sense that we will receive thanks or recompense. Taking up the cross means seeking to wash the feet of those we wish to draw into this life; from young people with no sense of morals or ideals, families in crisis, the imprisoned and homeless, the addicted and damaged, refugees and those on the edge; the lonely, vulnerable and all who feel abandoned and alone. To **all** these and more we are called to reveal the richness of life found in Jesus – the Kingdom Life – called to bring healing of the fractures within society – the balm of God's love, and in doing so, refresh our own hearts in Christ.



## Deuteronomy 30: 15-end

<sup>15</sup> See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. <sup>16</sup> If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God<sup>[b]</sup> that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. <sup>17</sup> But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, <sup>18</sup> I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. <sup>19</sup> I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, <sup>20</sup> loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

## Philemon: 1-21

<sup>1</sup> Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,<sup>[a]</sup>  
To Philemon our dear friend and co-worker, <sup>2</sup> to Apphia our sister,<sup>[b]</sup> to Archippus our fellow-soldier, and to the church in your house:

<sup>3</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Philemon's Love and Faith

<sup>4</sup> When I remember you<sup>[c]</sup> in my prayers, I always thank my God <sup>5</sup> because I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith towards the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup> I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective when you perceive all the good that we<sup>[d]</sup> may do for Christ. <sup>7</sup> I have indeed received much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, my brother.

<sup>8</sup> For this reason, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do your duty, <sup>9</sup> yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love—and I, Paul, do this as an old man, and now also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus.<sup>[e]</sup> <sup>10</sup> I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment. <sup>11</sup> Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful<sup>[f]</sup> both to you and to me. <sup>12</sup> I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. <sup>13</sup> I wanted to keep him with me, so that he might be of service to me in your place during my imprisonment for the gospel; <sup>14</sup> but I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced.

<sup>15</sup> Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back for ever, <sup>16</sup> no longer as a slave but as more than a slave, a beloved brother—especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

<sup>17</sup> So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. <sup>18</sup> If he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. <sup>19</sup> I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand: I will repay it. I say nothing about your owing me even your own self. <sup>20</sup> Yes, brother, let me have this benefit from you in the Lord! Refresh my heart in Christ. <sup>21</sup> Confident of your obedience, I am writing to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

## Luke 14: 25-33

<sup>25</sup> Now large crowds were travelling with him; and he turned and said to them, <sup>26</sup> 'Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. <sup>27</sup> Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. <sup>28</sup> For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? <sup>29</sup> Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, <sup>30</sup> saying, "This fellow began to build and was not able to finish." <sup>31</sup> Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? <sup>32</sup> If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. <sup>33</sup> So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.