

Proper 18 Year C

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Psalm 1

Luke 14:25-33

The cost of discipleship.

You may be assailed by doorstep evangelists asking you if you're saved. The answer to give them, and it disconcerts them, is that yes, you *have been* saved, you *are being* saved, and you *will be* saved. It's a process. Salvation costs you nothing, but discipleship costs you everything. Salvation occurs in a moment. Discipleship takes a lifetime. It's *decision* versus long-lasting discipline. The trouble with *decision* is that when you hit hard times and life doesn't seem to be working, you become disillusioned with Jesus rather than devoted to Jesus. The person who told you it was easy was lying to you. It's persistent discipleship that matters.

Jesus is not a salesman. He's an anti-salesman. He doesn't 'big up' his product like most salesmen; he is brutal about what it will mean. 'Don't buy my way of life unless you are prepared to take the flak'. He's not conning you. In the gospel, he illustrates what it will take to live a life of discipleship. He illustrates this in several ways, but the message of them all is: don't give up.

We live in a world where I think people give up too easily. We've made it too easy for people not to persist. It's hard learning how to spell, so people don't bother. It's hard learning how to write grammatically, so people don't bother. It's hard learning to sing properly so people don't bother. It's hard to learn a foreign language, so people don't bother. It's hard learning how to be good at something, so people don't bother. Our society does people no good by telling that taking part is the important thing. Rubbish! Young people need to learn how to persist, in order to have skills to survive in the dog-eat-dog world out there. But so often they quit before they get near having them. People give up on God, some people give up on their relationships, they give up on their children. Jesus says, 'Don't give up.'

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.

No one teaches about love as much as Jesus. No one demonstrates love like Jesus. And here Jesus uses the word 'hate.' Middle East people use language much more colourfully than we do. Listen to the news. I think he is using *hate* not as we might use it, but as a call to love less. He's saying that a relationship with him needs to be in an altogether different from every other relationship we have. No one can be as significant to us as him. So hate simply means love less and put God first, having priority over family members and one's own life. Other concerns are to take second place. Think of how family loyalty can be unhealthy. Mafia: where family loyalty commands murder. Family honour that leads people to kill. Parents oppressing offspring. It could be parents saying, 'We don't want you to go to that church, or that Rector.' Jesus is saying if you're going to follow him, expect opposition, expect ostracism. Not everyone will approve of a life that is devoted to him, but don't take the path of least resistance.

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? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish'.

We commit ourselves to too much. We find it difficult to say no. We will have to, otherwise we'll kill ourselves. We've got to get over our wanting to please others. It's better to do one or two things well than ten things badly. Jesus says, 'Before you start something, do your homework. Make sure you got a plan. Otherwise, you'll be like someone who says 'I'm going to build a house extension'. Halfway through, they run out of money. They didn't consult an architect and now they're fools. Ireland is full of this.

Think of a couple that care more about the wedding than the marriage. I did 25 weddings a year in England, and it's well known in clergy circles that the more extravagant the wedding, the sooner the divorce. I know someone who was ordained the year before me who resigned her post because she wanted her weekends back. What did she think it would be like? I know of priests who quit parish ministry after two years because they can't hack the stress! I have some sympathy with that, being myself *hated* by some of my flock. Don't stick your head above the parapet unless you are willing to carry it through and take the flak. Do not quit. A disciple needs discipline.

People seem to want to be a member of a team. They join clubs, they play games. They want to win. Watch people with electronic gadgets on which they play games. Video games are not sinful, they're just *stupid*. Young people want to be on a virtual team, conquer a foe, and win a great, epic battle. So they

do it with their thumbs and it makes them feel good. It is pointless! It doesn't count. Real evil people are not conquered. Real oppressed people are not liberated. Real lives are not changed for the better. It's all fake. We all need to relax, but for goodness sake don't let this sort of mindless twaddle rot your brain – because it does! And it makes you too easily satisfied.

If you want to do something, you need to get off your backsides, heed the words of the Lord and do something that actually matters. Leave a legacy for other people, not just a high score on some stupid game. And do not give up. There are two options: forward or death. Not to fight for right is to live a living death. I used to think that people were basically good, but the longer I'm in parochial ministry, the more I think that the default mode of our human hearts is selfishness, laziness, quitting. If we call ourselves disciples, we need discipline.

How's your Bible reading? How's your spiritual life? How's your repentance? How's your devotion? How's your financial giving? Where are you serving? Who are you helping? What are you accomplishing? What are you completing? You're not going to make it alone. You need to be in community. And we need the support and advice and rebuke of God's Word to point us in the right direction.

It is not easy. None of us has had it easy, and neither will we. But it will be *good*. Jesus never said it was easy – and it isn't. But don't give up because you think you're not getting anywhere. What you think of your efforts does not matter. You never know when you've accomplished something – you are not the best judge of the results of your efforts.

Today's gospel is about decision. Are you a do-er or a sponger? A disciple or a disappointment? A contributor or a leech? You're going to die. It may be soon, it may not be soon, but you will end up in a box. So don't waste your life. Do not give up. Live your life so that, when you do die, at least your children and grandchildren have an example to follow.