

Galatians 5:1,13-25

1 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

13 You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. 14 For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' 15 If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

16 So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

19 The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

Luke 9:51-62

51 As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. 52 And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; 53 but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. 54 When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, 'Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?' 55 But Jesus turned and rebuked them. 56 Then he and his disciples went to another village. 57 As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, 'I will follow you wherever you go.'

58 Jesus replied, 'Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.'

59 He said to another man, 'Follow me.'

But he replied, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father.'

60 Jesus said to him, 'Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.'

61 Still another said, 'I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.'

62 Jesus replied, 'No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.'

The Cost of discipleship

Luke 9:51-62

On the last occasion he was with his disciples Jesus told them to go into all the world and make disciples. This remains our calling as Christians. He didn't say to start churches, he said make disciples. So what is discipleship? This is from the same chapter of Luke as our reading: 23 *'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. 24 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. 25 What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?'*

Discipleship is living sacrificially for others. Giving your life to God. He's asking us what it is we want from life, because if we follow our own inclinations, we lose our very selves.

My attention was drawn the other day to the verse John 6:66, which says this: *From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.* Jesus was in the synagogue describing himself as the bread of life. He then anticipated the act of communion by saying that if they wanted eternal life they would have to eat his flesh and drink his blood.

We're so familiar with the meaning of it now, but as this was before the last supper, they must have thought he was teaching some sort of bizarre cannibalism. And these were people who had been physically living and travelling with him 24/7.

The cost of discipleship is the challenge for us now as it was then, and it's not easy. But I think we're in a very different place. All of the original twelve except John died before their time. They lived in constant fear of persecution. In November 2013, 7 year old Anmol was killed on the way to Sunday School near his Indian village. He was beaten, mutilated and drowned in a pond by local extremists who objected to his parents' conversion to Christianity.

Living in a western and mostly free democracy we have to try and make sense of what discipleship means for us because it cannot be the same as for the persecuted christians.

There's a sense in which Jesus really doesn't belong in the 21st century western church. He was a refugee as a child, the son of a carpenter, a homeless travelling preacher and condemned to death as a common criminal. An outsider rejected by many. Is that really who we follow? The western church culture over the last 2000 years, sometimes described as Christendom, has created a meek and mild Jesus who, let's be honest, doesn't really challenge us but is designed to comfort and reassure us. A safe Jesus. But look at the gospels. Jesus asks everything. That you drop everything and follow him, as the fishermen did. As Annette said last week, St Paul asks that we 'clothe ourselves with Christ'. I ask myself does that fit with how I live? If I'm honest, not really.

Of course He promises to be with us always but most of the really challenging stuff in the New Testament also comes from him.

In this country we're blessed that we are not persecuted for our faith and also that by the standards of most of the world, we're rich. And so we have to make sense of what discipleship means to us, living in our own privileged situation, which has different challenges. What is the cost of discipleship for us? Is there a cost? The gospel reading we heard is from Luke, and at this point they're probably in a Samaritan village, or at least near one, as James and John have decided that due to a lack of hospitality they would like to call down fire from heaven on the inhabitants! Clearly trying and failing to impress Jesus by channelling the prophet Elijah. A man approaches and says he would like to follow them wherever they go. To which I might ask am I prepared to just go? Wherever the Spirit leads? Throughout his gospel Luke uses the idea of journeying, and Jesus lived a nomadic existence from the start of his ministry.

So here he issues a series of challenges to three people.

One A man said to him, 'I will follow you wherever you go.'

58 Jesus replied, 'Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.' Craddock in his commentary interprets this as 'I am totally dependent on the hospitality of others. Are you willing to be?' Samaria of course was the worst place to hope for free bed and board. Samaritans were fiercely and sometimes violently opposed to Jews.

Are we prepared for what our own spiritual journey might look like?

Are we aware that it might not fit our ideas of a successful life? Our instinct might be to withdraw and stay safe as we are. But this is an invitation to risk an adventure.

Two *Jesus said to another man, 'Follow me.' But he replied, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father.'* This is about priorities. Craddock in his commentary interprets this as 'Loyalty to me takes precedence over obligation to a parent'. Will there always be something more urgent? How central is our faith to everything we are? Or is it simply just one of the things we do? Music, cricket, shopping, golf, church? Might it just be the case that if Jesus is given priority the rest of my life will begin to fall into place? Craddock in his commentary says *'the radical nature of Jesus' words lies in his claim to priority over the best, not the worst of human relationships. He said - not to choose him over the devil but over the family. And the remarkable thing is that those who have done so have been freed from worship of family and have found the distance necessary to love them'*.

Three *Still another said, 'I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.'* 62 *Jesus replied, 'No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.'*

This seems again to be about priorities but Jesus's reply uses a well known proverb of the time: if you're ploughing a field you need to have your focus on where you're going to get a straight furrow. If you get distracted, and look around, the furrow will also veer to the side. This connects back to the opening verse, where Jesus sets his sights on Jerusalem, and will not allow anything to distract

him. What is our focus? Do we even have a focus? I found myself being deeply challenged by all this because it goes to the very heart of why we're here. It challenges the very basis of how we live as Christians in such a consumer, money and tech driven society which has its priorities completely upside down. The good news in all this is that Jesus did not come to condemn but to save and set free. Our societies are largely controlled by the self interested voices of the powerful who, because they don't acknowledge God, produce systems based around human greed rather than love for others.

Jesus meets each of us where we are and his call on each of us to be fruitful comes from the need to become fully who he made us to be. So the woman at the well is shown how the whole of her life has been a search for meaning, Nicodemus the religious leader that he needs to receive God's Spirit, the woman caught in adultery that she is not condemned.

The opportunity is there for each of us to be made whole, and God in His grace will allow this to happen if we make ourselves vulnerable, because He only wants good things for us.

So discipleship is losing our life for others. It's giving all that we are to God. And this is not, I repeat not about doing more stuff, it's a mindset of outward generosity and love. It's about who we are and who we become and not what we do. And what is the cost? Acknowledging our need of God and surrendering everything to Him. He is the Way, we need to walk it.