

Luke 14 - Carry the cross, Count the Cost, continue being salty Christians – Sept 2016 - Charlie Boyle

Context – banquet ...many invited, all welcome, few chosen.
(see previous sermon!)

First in our series on discipleship.

We begin with the cost of being a disciple

This week we have had the funeral of Barbara Siberry, for those of you who weren't there was a wonderful story of the dedication with which she devoted herself and her whole household to including the dining room to winning the campaign to get elected in the Littledown ward. Her dining room was submerged under a piles of election literature, leaflets, canvas notes and the all-important electoral roll. Having done a similar thing myself, I know that it is a single-minded focus and devotion that is required to get elected. That is what Jesus is talking about here in the first paragraph of this passage. **If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.**

Now Jesus is not really asking people to hate their mother, for that would be to contradict one of the Ten Commandments ...honour your father and mother... number 5...he is using hyperbole to make the point. He wants the people to listen and take notice!

Carrying the Cross – is about being 100% dedicated to the cause, **in Barbara's case and any politician who stands for public office, it is about putting oneself second to the cause. For example when my mother was campaigning against the Newbury bypass, she was 100% dedicated to the cause, the family came second, the brothers and sisters came second, the husband came second. My step-father had to go out and fend for himself...taking the opportunity to indulge himself with lunch in local hostelryes...he rather enjoyed it in fact...no reflection on my mother's cooking I hasten to add! She was even quoted in one paper, erroneously I hasten to add, that the marmalade making had to wait, as she arrived to demonstrate on her rusty bicycle.** That is the standard that Jesus is asking for....putting him first in all we do and say.

Jesus is not denying the importance of close family and living in harmony with them but he is again talking about priorities for living. **Having family and friends to stay should not prevent us from putting him first, to spending time with Him,**

to coming to Church, bring them along! Jesus is calling us to put God first, as indeed it says in the Old Testament...you shall have no other gods before me.

For some of us the call to be disciples of Christ, causes division in our families. Your faith might divide you from your spouse or family or loved ones...TODAY I COME WITHOUT FAMILY SO I KNOW HOW YOU FEEL BUT WE ARE AMONGST FRIENDS, and fellow believers. That is a cost and cross, we have to bear in large or small ways of following Him. He is our priority.

We have to carry his cross, as followers of Christ, as disciples of His we bear witness to Him and His work in us.

What might that look for us?

As I have written in the Monthly news, it might be that we make a move that is costly, we move from a place of comfort and security, in response to God's call. We move from a place where we are known and loved to a place where we are outsiders.

Each one of us will have a different cross to bear.

Jesus calls us to **carry the cross**, the cross of Christ crucified, following Him and being a disciple of him is sacrificial it is also costly.

Secondly he calls us to **Count the cost.**

What does it cost us to follow Jesus?

Do we have to make a sacrifice? YES

Do we have to count the cost? YES. I know Lynne has just made an appeal for people, like me, to increase our giving by £6/month but the real cost of following Christ is greater than that.

²⁸“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it?²⁹ For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, ³⁰ saying, 'This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.'

Jesus does not want people to come to follow Him who have not first thought it through carefully. In responding to the **call to be ordained there was a cost, there is a cost, not only in terms of the sacrifice of wages, I went on a could it be you day, for those thinking about becoming Vicars, at Christ Church Clifton in Bristol and found out back then in 2004 that the Vicar's stipend was £17,000, which was quite a drop from what I was earning as a lawyer in the City. That fact alone put me off the call to be ordained for a few years. But also the move and response to**

the call to go to Cornwall for my curacy, it was costly. We had to get two cars for a start but also Cornwall, beautiful place though it is, was a long way from our family and friends. There is always a cost when God calls us to move, around the country or to different parts of the world, in terms of the loss of friendships, moving the children from schools...but that is nothing in comparison to what Christians facing persecution might have to endure in other countries. The cost for them of following Jesus is a call on their life on this earth. Take for example ...those who have died most recently in the Middle East for being Christians. You may recall last year. According to Open Doors, back in 2015 The Islamic State (IS) in Libya beheaded 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians.

Now of course we are called to give of our time, talents and treasure but there are other ways that we count the cost.

For myself, if wearing my dog collar, out walking some people may be more friendly and give a warm greeting, others may do the opposite. Perhaps they had a bad experience with a Vicar or at Church, I understand that. It is a small thing and pales into comparison to those who lose their lives for their faith but nonetheless a sacrifice.

As I referred to earlier that is not necessarily about our level of regular giving but there is a cost to walking with Jesus.

Now for us in this country the cost of being a Christian, might be financial but more often than not it is costly in other ways.

People might shun us at work when they hear we are Christians, or go to Church regularly. Or they may look to trip us up or examine our inevitable failings and be only too ready to point them out to us and say "that's not very Christian". Now we know that being a Christian is not about being perfect but knowing we are all broken, imperfect people who are forgiven in Christ for our mistakes yet all loved, all welcome, all invited..

So Jesus calls us to **carry the cross**, the cross of Christ crucified and **Count the cost**, finally he calls us to **be salty Christians!**

Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? ³⁵ It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out.

"Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."

Salt is good. It was in Palestinian times a preservative but also as a manure. It is absurd to think that salt can lose its saltiness but likewise it is absurd to think

that we could be disciples of Jesus and not put him first. If we lose our distinctive difference as Christians and become like the world we are not living up to the call to be his disciples. It is all or nothing guys. We need to remember that we are either in as a disciple of Jesus or not. **The parting words of my atheist step-father to me last night as I said goodbye to him and the family were "Go bring more to Sainthood"**, we are either following the call of Jesus or not, there is no half way house.

You see even a small amount of faith in Jesus is enough. As I said to Barbara, it is OK to have doubts, even Thomas, had doubts, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, that is enough. Even a small amount of leaven will work its way through the whole lump or bread dough, so too will a little salt work its way through whatever it is mixed into. **Sea water contains only 3% of salt, yet all of the sea is salty. The Christians, therefore, though even in a minority, in any land or community, can make a difference for this world, and for the Kingdom of Christ.**

As the Henry Matthew Commentary on the Whole Bible says of Salt:

*"The doctrine of the Gospel is as salt;
It is penetrating, quick, and powerful (Hebrews 4:12);
It reaches the heart (Acts 2:37).
It is cleansing,
It is relishing, and
Note, Christians, and especially ministers, are the salt of the earth."*

However little we think we are doing...we make a difference, so continue to be salty Christians. Take Pip's appeal for drivers, taking our Harvest gifts out, next Sunday to those who have been bereaved or housebound, it is an example of the salt and love going out from this place, this community to those in need.

In Matthew 28, in Jesus' words of the Great Commission we are called to go and make disciples of all nations. So what does that mean? It means seeking to help people grow in Christ likeness. To model and teach other Christians in the basics of the Christian faith. That means helping others understand the Bible, prayer, doctrine, Christian living, worship and serving.

How do we do this?

Most simply by putting Christ first, going to church regularly, praying, worshipping reading the Bible and serving. One of the easiest ways to grow in faith and discipleship Christ of course is to join a home group and very pleased to say that we still have plenty of space and a new home group starting or you

could come along regularly to morning prayer in church on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Or help on the Alpha course or join a prayer triplet partnership, Suzie can give you details.

So in summary...

Carry the Cross

Count the Cost

Continue to be salty Christians....