

**St Botolph's Church Worthing**  
**4 September 2016**  
**Luke 14: 25 – 33**  
**Reverend Roger Walker**

Our Gospel Reading today makes being a disciple of Jesus sound impossibly hard: for he tells us:

'whoever does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters – even his own life – cannot be my disciple

whoever does not carry his cross and follow me – cannot be my disciple

whoever does not give up everything he has, cannot be my disciple'

Take those three at face value and we may as well all get up and go home, because none of us would qualify to be disciples of Jesus. So what is Jesus teaching here? He makes it a little clearer with his two parables about being able to afford a building and about a King considering whether his army can defeat another King's army. These are saying to us that following Jesus – being his disciple – must not be a quick emotional response but must be considered carefully.

So let's consider Jesus' three conditions for discipleship and see if we can make them any more palatable and realistic. First: hating our family. This sounds the very opposite of what Jesus teaches about love, and hating our own lives seems in direct contradiction to his command to love our neighbours as we love ourselves. What we do need to remember here is that in his teaching Jesus frequently used hyperbole – putting something in outrageous and exaggerated terms to catch his listeners' attention. He has certainly done that here, but what is behind the hyperbole? We know that in our lives there are many and conflicting demands, and quite a lot come from our own families.

We can get so caught up in family affairs that our faith in Jesus can be pushed to the back of our lives. What he is saying here is 'put your faith and your discipleship at the front of your lives, and then your relationships with your family will assume their proper importance'. It's a long way from hating them, but it did catch our attention and make us think about family priorities, didn't it? That's what hyperbole does – but what about hating our own lives? That, if you think about it, is simply a hyperbolic way of saying Put Jesus and the service of Jesus rather than self, at the centre of your lives, and that's what we all want to do.

So we can reinterpret that first very difficult saying of Jesus to say something meaningful. Like the man building the tower or the King going to war we have sat down and considered it carefully. The next condition of discipleship is one we are more familiar with hearing: that we should take up our cross and follow Jesus. It would, however, have been very difficult for those hearing it for the first time. They would picture a criminal carrying his cross to the place of

execution: not a pleasant thought, but look behind the hyperbole again and we see that Jesus is saying there are some aspects of the Christian life that you will find difficult and would rather not embrace. But, like the criminal with his cross, you cannot put these down and they will be with you to the end. We all know what our individual crosses are and these words encourage us to go on dealing with them rather than pushing them away and ignoring them. Jesus' third condition is another one that is very difficult for us wealthy people.

I know we all think we are poor, but compared with the majority of people in this world we are rich beyond their wildest dreams. We do not, however, want to give up everything we have to be a disciple of Jesus. We may console ourselves by saying this is hyperbole again, and what it is saying is – give to charity and support the Church in the way I do. So that one is all right, but I do think that Jesus is asking us to look a bit more closely at our possessions.

We tend to consider that we have earned them and therefore they are ours. But a bit of considering and you will see that all that we own is part of God's creation, and one of the greatest truths in the Bible is contained in St Paul's words to Timothy when writing to him about money. He said 'we brought nothing into this world and it is certain that we can carry nothing out'.

Everything we have bought is not OURS, but is lent to us by God for the time we are here on earth. So we should treat it as belonging to God and to be used to serve him. That makes a great deal of sense of giving up everything we have, hard though it is for us materialistic beings to take it on board and act upon it. I suspect it does get easier as we get older and see that we are getting closer to repaying God's loan: unless, of course, we have that feeling of 'we must keep it all safe to pass on to our children'. It's a natural feeling but not necessarily good for the children's spiritual outlook.

However we look at them, Jesus' conditions for discipleship are hard. By seeing their hyperbolic nature and considering them, rather than just reacting to them, I hope we have made it possible for us to apply them in our own lives without the feeling 'I cannot possibly do this'

AMEN

Rev Roger Walker

4.9.16