

Wednesday reflection – 6 November 2024, by David Kennedy

Now large crowds were travelling with Jesus, and he turned and said to them, ²⁶“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. ²⁷Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸For 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? ²⁹Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, ³⁰saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ ³¹Or 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? ³²If he cannot, then while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. ³³So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions. *St Luke 12. 25-33*

We have another tough Gospel reading from St Luke. Jesus’ opening words are very stark: ‘Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even life itself, cannot be my disciple’.

Hate is a shocking word, and to hate those whose lives are so closely bound with our own sounds extraordinary. And what about hating life itself? And did Jesus do this himself – is it possible that he might have hated the Blessed Virgin Mary and St Joseph? And did Jesus hate life? Surely not. The Gospels tell us that he honoured his parents and was obedient to them. And one of the compelling things about Jesus is his vision of life. After all, he offers life in all its fullness. And he exulted in the beauty of creation, the beauty of children, the beauty of seeing human lives transformed. Jesus *is* the fully alive human being. So, is he speaking a kind of inverted riddle? Are his words really about hate or are they more about love?

Is he saying, in a very arresting and radical way – ‘If you want to come with me, you must love me so much that even your deepest human ties and affections must seem almost like hate by comparison?’ And that following me is the very secret of life. Remember his parable about the pearl of great price for which a man sold everything he had to possess it. To follow Jesus is to find such a life as to make everything else seem contemptuous by comparison. Jesus’ words in this passage teach us that discipleship is everything. Following Jesus, obeying his teaching, seeking his kingdom, modelling our lives on his, is the absolute priority and requires total

commitment – not half-heated commitment, or luke-warm commitment, but total and absolute commitment.

And Jesus warns his would-be disciples that this type of discipleship is not without cost. So, he tells the parable of the man who decides to build a tower but who must first sit down and figure out whether he has enough cash for all those bricks, cement and labour. If he doesn't and runs out of money half-way through, well, he will be ridiculed – 'Look at that fellow who couldn't finish what he started'. Or the parable of the king with 10,000 soldiers who picks a fight with another king who has 20,000 soldiers. Can he win? If not, he'd better send our envoys to strike a peace-deal.

But then there is another sting – Jesus warns those who would follow him that they must give up *all* their possessions. Now in Jesus' day, that is exactly what Peter, and Andrew, and Matthew and Thomas did. And some Christians, like monks and nuns, are called to do the same today. But the Church defends the right to hold personal possessions and property. But if they get in the way of discipleship; if they distract us from following Jesus, Jesus would say, perhaps they need to go. We can't serve God and Mammon.

I wonder how many would-be disciples left him as the bar was just too high. But perhaps they couldn't see that he was asking for their love and companionship, in his mission to save the world. Let us respond to his call and I close with the wonderful words of the poet George Herbert which to me express our desire to follow him fully.

Come, my Way, my Truth, my Life:

Such a way as gives us breath;

Such a truth as ends all strife,

Such a life as killeth death.

Come, my Light, my Feast, my Strength:

Such a light as shows a feast,

Such a feast as mends in length,

Such a strength as makes his guest.

Come, my Joy, my Love, my Heart:

Such a joy as none can move,

Such a love as none can part,

Such a heart as joys in love.