

Sermon 7 September 2025 Being a disciple of Christ

1 Peter 4:7-13 Luke 14:25-33

In this passage Jesus really does lay down a challenge for us as his followers. He pulls no punches; he makes no bones about the fact that if we are to be genuine followers, then we must be prepared to make sacrifices. I quote, *'And if you do not carry your cross and follow me, you cannot be my disciple. But don't begin until you count the cost.'* Luke 14:27-28. He certainly doesn't sugar-coat the invitation to become one of his followers but he does expect us to take up that challenge.

Can you imagine a politician campaigning for an election telling people that if they vote for him/her, they can expect higher taxes, lower wages and social security subsidies to be slashed? Probably not conducive to winning votes, but Jesus is actually doing something quite similar.

It reminds me of the ad Ernest Shackleton was to have posted before his expedition to the South Pole. 'Men wanted for hazardous journey. Small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness. Safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in the case of success.' Now, there is some doubt whether that ad actually existed, but the point is this, those men who signed up for that expedition would have known precisely what was in store for them. Shackleton would have made that quite clear. And yet they signed up; they chose to become one of his followers.

So in the same way, Jesus challenges us to become one of his followers and in doing so, be prepared to make sacrifices. So what does this really mean? Just what is this challenge that Jesus is laying down before us? I want to make a couple of points.

Firstly, just as Jesus relates how you wouldn't embark on the building of a tower without first sitting down and estimating the cost (*'For who would begin construction of a building without first calculating the cost to see if there is enough money to finish it?'* Luke 14:28), in other words, doing some sort of a budget (rings a few bells?!), so we need to prepare ourselves. And I think this is not so much about being physically prepared as being mentally prepared. We need to be aware of what is expected of us, how we intend to fulfil those expectations.

The second point is that I don't believe we need to be frightened by this challenge. Now Jesus is quite provocative here: *'If you want to be my disciple, you must, by comparison, hate everyone else – your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters – yes, even your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple.'* Luke 14:26-27. But Jesus was often a little on the extreme side when he wanted to make a point. After all, it was Jesus who said, *'If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away.'* Matthew 21:8-9. A tad on the harsh side if you take it literally.

In this case, these words of Jesus are a provocative way of saying that our priority in life must be to Jesus and to his work of completing God's kingdom here on earth. (Rings more bells?!). They are simply a provocative way of saying that as followers of Jesus our responsibility extends beyond our flesh-and-blood family to the entire human family. We could insert there the word 'community.' I am sure we can all relate to that. These words are simply a provocative way of saying that if we want to be followers of Jesus, we must follow him not only on Sunday morning but also in our day to day lives Monday to Saturday. More bells?!

Here I want to emphasise the point that we don't need to be frightened by this challenge. Just because we are challenged to make God a priority in our lives, it doesn't mean we have to be a Mother Teresa or a Francis of Assisi (you have heard me say that before!). Our priority just needs to be reflected in the way we live our lives, and most importantly, how we treat one another. Let me tell you about a couple of people.

Waleed Sadruddin was a 17-year-old who lived in Portland, Oregon in 1989. Across the street from his home there was a crack house. When he saw his friends getting into drugs and joining street gangs, he decided to do something. He organised his peers into a high school fraternity, as a positive alternative to gangs. They sponsored dances, cleaned up graffiti in the area, helped out with

homework for those who needed it. It was nothing major but what a difference it made in their community.

Then there was Charlie DeLeo. Charlie grew up as a tough kid on New York's East Side. After returning from Vietnam, he got a job as a maintenance man on the Statue of Liberty. Part of his job was to take care of the torch in the statue's hand. He had to make sure the sodium lights were always working and that the 200 glass windows in the torch were always clean.

Charlie dedicated his work to the Lord. He saw his work as being of a service to the people. He took pride in his work and he regarded the large torch as his chapel. Charlie also received a commendation from the Red Cross for donating his 65th pint of blood. He wasn't wealthy by any stretch of the imagination but he gave a significant percentage of his earnings to Mother Teresa's work in India.

So you see, Waleed and Charlie are people just like you and me. They were motivated to make some sort of sacrifice, not a major by any means, but it was still enough to make a difference. They were motivated to give something of themselves in order to improve the lot of others. That's all God requires of us. We are not expected to be giants in the field of social service. We are not expected to change the world through our own actions, but we are expected to do our little bit, and as I have said on more than one occasion, if we all do our little bit, then together we will make a difference; we just might together change the landscape.

I finish with two quotes. From our first reading: *'God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them to serve one another.'* 1 Peter 4:10. And that well-known quote by Martin Luther King, *'Life's most persistent and urgent question is, "What are you doing for others?"'* Simple, straightforward and pertinent to the challenge Jesus lays down for us in terms of being followers of his and being justified in calling ourselves Christians.

Let me close with a prayer written by Charlie DeLeo himself: 'Lord, I do not expect to have the faith of Abraham, nor do I ever expect to have the leadership of Moses, nor the strength of Samson, nor the courage of David, nor the wisdom of Solomon. But what I do expect, Lord, is your call to me to serve. What is your will, I shall do. What is your command, I shall follow with joy. And I shall not fail you for you are all I seek to serve. Amen.'