

## Sermon

### Luke 14.25-33

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

How was your week? Mine has been mixed – lots of fun things and getting back to work things punctuated by too many trips to the phone shop to sort out my new phone – as if having your phone stolen isn't painful enough – the new one not working has been a serious irritation... on one of these phone shop jaunts – on my way home I was walking past the podiatrist at the bottom of Courthill Road – you all know that? Richard you know that don't you? As I passed the podiatrist I noticed a man – in what I can only describe as distress talking loudly to a woman – he was saying in obviously miserable way that he had just had the worse experience of his life...

At this point I found my usual speed walking slowing to a casual dawdle as my curiosity was somewhat piqued. What on earth was this worse experience of this man's life – I mean outside the podiatrists – maybe he'd had a seriously painful verruca treated – or an ingrown toenail surgery – maybe someone had stolen his phone – or he had heard some awful news - what on earth was so bad...? At the point my dawdle was on the verge of coming to a stand still thankfully he said – the worst experience of his life was paying for the parking machine.

And we all know what he meant – don't we?

So – what would be the worst thing that could ever happen to you - excluding you or someone you love dying? Maybe think of the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> worst thing that could happen ....

Xxxx

One of my worst things that could happen to me – I am very ashamed to admit this to you - is having to be in a room full of clergy – I know its shameful...

And this week my dread was in my diary as we had the Diocesan Conference – as it happened it had lay ministers as well as clergy for the first time so the dog collars en masse softened the blow...

Bishop Christopher in his opening speech read from the gospel of John and reminded us that Jesus prayed that we must be all one. Asking us to find connection rather than difference – and the conference continued positively with encouragements and good things...

So we come to our Gospel reading for today and we hope in the midst of all of our dreads and our desire for connection to hear something similarly encouraging – something to give us hope and light in a world which feels increasingly worrying and fearful.

So what nuggets does Jesus offer us today....

Jesus says – ‘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’.

Sorry Jesus – what was that? Hate – hate those we are meant to love...?

I’ve read many commentaries on this – of course Jesus didn’t really mean hate – as I think it is generally seen as uncomfortable and not cuddly enough for our day and age. Jesus meant following him will not be easy.

One of the reasons not given that I think could be credible is – maybe Jesus was having a really bad day – it does say large crowds are following him and we know Jesus likes to have a bit of lone time – maybe he was simply trying to get them off his back by being outrageous...

But as Jesus continues – it seems he meant it – because he just ratchets this message up....

‘Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. For 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?’

To be fair – I’m not a good person to answer this – as that would be me – thinking let’s build a tower without working out the cost.... But sensible people like Sean... he would estimate the cost.

I was trying to persuade Sean recently that we should both train as roofers to fix the hall roof – luckily he is the kind of person who does count the cost – and he said very politely – that for many reasons the vicar and churchwardens becoming roofers isn’t a great idea! Anyone else fancy it?

So Jesus tells us that following him – will be costly – but hating our family is a bit extra – aren’t we all supposed to be one?

I think perhaps what Jesus is getting at is – that we don’t need to go home and shout hateful things at our family after our lovely Eucharist – that would not be what he is saying... he is suggesting that we love others radically and doing this really well – will really irritate our family. Teenagers – take note – be more Jesus – its so irritating for your parents!

Getting some context on our reading might help us to understand more about how to really irritate our families – and to see what Jesus is getting at...

So directly before this reading we have multiple stories of healing on the sabbath whilst being watched in the pharisee’s house – we have the parable of the wedding feast where we have to not find the most important seats but– deliberately place ourselves in the cheap seats and making room for others to feel more important. Then the story of the great banquet – where Jesus basically says when someone of importance invites you for dinner – instead of doing the conventional thing and inviting them back – instead invite everyone – especially those who are not the kind of folk you ordinarily invite for dinner... get everyone in to eat with you.

When we think about that – it is quite radical really. Imagine the mayor invites you for dinner and is waiting expectantly for you to invite him back as you cook a rather good curry - instead of inviting him back you invite all the folk who have never been invited for dinner in their lives back to yours - the lonely – the poor – the addicted – the homeless... yep – the lot – they all come back for dinner.

This context makes what Jesus says a bit more understandable – Jesus is saying the most ridiculous things – I imagine Jesus would have had his large audience laughing at the ridiculousness of all of this

– I get the sense that upright families in Jesus’ day would need to be seen to be correct and moving in good social circles to elevate their status – just like in desperate housewives...

Despite the likely humour Jesus is now saying – I mean it... this is actually how it is – follow me and be radical – follow me and you might lose friends and family – follow me and there will be a cross to bear...

Of course we know that Jesus paid with his life because of this radical love.

The question for us is - how far are we prepared to go as we follow Jesus?

Jesus gives us a stinging final line – ‘So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions’. How much wriggling out of that one do we all need to do?

I’m always fascinated by those folk who work really hard to make others feel unwelcome by things Jesus didn’t say – giving the impression that Jesus said you can only belong if you are straight and have money for the offering so the pastor can buy a large car – I mean – I can see where they are going with that... but taking this literally is just too hard – seriously what difference would those Christians so keen to be literal make in the world if they took this one line literally?

Because Jesus is saying – give it all up – all of it - for him for radical love... he says throw your doors open to everyone – and change... he says love so hard that even your closest people will be offended by it... I suppose if I followed Jesus’ words literally and gave all we have away – Richard might be a tad annoyed – because doing this fully is somewhat irritating...

Thankfully – we are not saviours of the world – but we follow Jesus to share his love – let’s commit to making one small change in our lives – we are too human and weak to go the full distance – so let’s do something – maybe focus on what really good thing might really irritate your family – and start there... giving money to charity – inviting a neighbour for dinner – giving your time to a project to help feed and heat those who need it desperately this winter – if it irritates someone in your family and it follows Jesus’ love – it is probably on the right lines....

Perhaps balance it by showing that family member radical love too – after all Jesus is praying that we are all one ....

Amen