

Sunday between 4<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> September [23]

Luke 14:25-35

What have you given up for Jesus? Take a moment to think about the question, it is not a challenge, rather it is an opportunity to reflect. In today's gospel reading Jesus offers insight into what it means to be a disciple and what that discipleship might cost. The reading points to possessions, family connections and even one's own life as things that disciples will shun and even hate in order to follow Christ. In the letter of St Paul to Philemon, we see how discipleship has cost Paul, and others mentioned in this letter, their freedom as they are imprisoned for their faith. But what about us, what does our discipleship cost?

The first cost to us is time, in order to be a disciple of Jesus we must spend some time learning about Jesus, praying, worshipping and sharing with others. In each and every variation of Christianity there is a commitment of time which forms a part of being a member of the church or faith community. Some spend more time in community, meeting together for study and worship, others expect disciples to spend more time in solitary prayer and reflection. There is no right or wrong amount of time, but we can all agree that in order to be a disciple we have to give some time to the practice and pursuit of discipleship.

Another cost to us might be in how we are viewed in society, by friends or within our family. It may well be that we have a Christian family and most of our friends are Christian too so we don't feel too much like our faith costs us in these aspects. But there will certainly be people in our lives who will not hold our faith, even if we are not particularly closely associated with these people. Perhaps they are work colleagues or neighbours, maybe members of a community association or sports club that we attend. The latest census information tells us that we are likely to come across people in our lives who do not share our faith, and for some of them, this might impact their opinion of us. Radical atheism would have people believe that faith is a sign of weakness or stupidity, which may make those who follow it a little wary of us. Others will have been impacted by church scandals and public messages in the name of Christians which they find offensive, and we might be assumed to be part of the problem, even if we have never been involved with or agree with them. We cannot pretend that we are persecuted in society here in Australia as our sisters and brothers elsewhere in the world are, but our faith may cost us some relationships.

Our faith lived well and actively, will also cost us energy. There is a requirement to focus and expend energy on anything we choose to do, our faith pursuits are no different, and our energy levels are finite. There is only so much we can do, only so many projects we can attend to, only a fixed amount of effort and brain power we can use before we become tired and need to recharge. When we choose to expend energy on faith-based pursuits we may have to give up or pass over on other interests that we hold. This won't be true for everyone, but for some there is so much more they would wish to partake in that they are able to.

There is also the question of our financial support of our faith. Those who are members of churches and regularly attend, will have come to some decision about stewardship of their resources, understood as God's providence bestowed on them, and how that can be used to resource the church. More generally, resourcing charitable undertakings and offering gifts of money and goods to various ministries are all part of discipleship, Jesus' teaching comes back to this time and again. Personally accumulated wealth and pious faith are incompatible, says Jesus, we cannot serve two masters, God and mammon, or as in today's reading, giving up possessions is a pre-requisite for being a disciple.

On reflection, we give up a great deal to be disciples, the cost is tangible and measurable in many ways. Jesus challenges his disciples in the gospel reading today to understand this cost and to pay it with full disclosure and understanding. In his parables he reminds them that before taking on any task, the wise person will look at the size of the task and its cost before making a start to ensure they have the resources to complete the work. That makes sense when we are talking about building a tower or fighting a battle, but what about being a

disciple? How do we know that we have enough resources to pay the costs involved in being a disciple?

Our first cost was time, and that is in our control. We may have to work and have other responsibilities, but time is not only measured in quantity, but also in quality. We can spend lots of time doing the work of discipleship but we can also be disciplined to spend a little bit of time, as often as we can, and achieve the same goal of prioritising time to the pursuit of discipleship. The next cost was relationships, and that is a difficult one. No one wants to find that being a Christian isolates them from the ones they love, but we are resourced for our relationships by Jesus' example and by the grace of God. Jesus showed us that love is the way, always, when it comes to people and so our call is to care for and love those around us, whatever their view of us might be. We need not separate ourselves from people who do not believe what we do, Jesus mixed with those that his followers least expected, and certainly didn't limit his friends to certain types of people. Where we are rejected by others, the grace of God is our sustaining resource. We can continue to recognise the love God has for them, even when they cannot recognise it themselves.

Our energy expended needs to be managed and resources, and Jesus was clear that he came to give life and to give it to the full. Rest and recuperation are not signs of weakness or failure, rather this is a faithful following of the example of Jesus who regularly withdrew from public ministry to spend time alone and with God. We need not avoid rest we should embrace it. Our example of managing energy can serve as an example to others in the ever-increasing pace of life. It is not something we do to manage our faith, it is completely integrated with and a requirement of discipleship. Finally, the financial and material cost of discipleship. Our understanding of stewardship is far wider than how much we donate to our church, it encompasses our finances but also our care and nurturing of the earth and other resources. There is no quick fix to share of how much is the right amount to give, rather we are invited to respond to God's grace with love. Jesus' own teaching on stewardship of resources celebrate the tiniest offerings given in love over the larger donations done for self-aggrandisement. It is for each of us to contribute in response to God, and we use prayer and scripture to guide us.

The final words of today's gospel reference salt, and faith should be a salt in our lives. We integrate it and benefit from its flavour in everything we do, and in so doing our discipleship ceases to become a project, and instead becomes who we are. Are we able to complete the race, finish the course and fulfil our discipleship commitments, Jesus asks? As with so much else in our Christian lives the answer is the same, by the grace of God, we will!