



The Cost of Being a Disciple

Call to Worship: Light of Lights, come into the dark places of our hearts;
Come and scatter the darkness, God of promise and hope.
As we delight in the rainbow, may we ever trust ourselves to you?
As the rainbow reaches to the heavens, let us know we are one with you.
We are under your protection:
We live in the splendour of your light: You offer us your glory and yourself.
Come Lord, lighten our darkness; renew our faith and our hope,
For truly our hope is only in you.

Hymn: Singing the Faith: 544: As the deer pants for the water

As the deer pants for the water, so my soul longs after you.
You alone are my heart's desire and I long to worship you.
*You alone are my strength, my shield,
To you alone may my spirit yield?
You alone are my heart's desire and I long to worship you.*

I want you more than gold or silver, only you can satisfy.
You alone are the real joy-giver and the apple of my eye.
You alone are my strength, my shield...

You're my friend and you are my brother, even though you are a king.
I love you more than any other, so much more than anything.
You alone are my strength, my shield...

Prayers of Adoration and Praise:

God of all created things,
God of all space and time,
God of the morning light,
We praise and adore you.

God of the evening,
God of Trinity, three in one,
Saviour Jesus, man and God, lover and friend,
Holy Spirit, comforter and advocate, ever present God,
We praise and adore you.

Thank you living Lord God,
For the sure foundation of our faith:
Built not on rules, but on Life:
Your life in your son Jesus Christ.

We thank you that your offer of love is unconditional:
Not governed by our ability to earn your love,
But by the deep and broad grace
You have shown the world in Jesus.

**We thank you that your grace is not offered to just a few,
But to all;
All are called to repent, all called to believe, all called to eternal life.**

We thank you that choice, not chance
Governs our discipleship;
The choice to say 'yes' to your call
To become followers of 'the way,'
But also we have the choice to refuse your call
And go our own way.

We thank you that you led us to say 'yes,'

We thank you that your Kingdom is not built
On fickle and temporary whims,
But on the sure foundation principles of love and peace, justice and righteousness

**We thank you that we are citizens of such a kingdom.
Living God, we choose the life you offer.
And ask for strength to live by the principles of your Kingdom. AMEN**

Readings:

Psalm 22:1-11. The cry of Jesus from the Cross (Good News Version)

My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?
I have cried desperately for help but still it does not come.
During the day I call to you my God but you do not answer.
I call at night, but get no rest.
But you are enthroned as the Holy One, the one whom Israel praises.
Our ancestors put their trust in you; they put their trust in you and you saved them.
They called to you and escaped from danger; they trusted in you and were not disappointed.

But I am no longer a human being; I am a worm, despised and scorned by everyone!
All who see me jeer at me; they stick out their tongues and shake their heads.
"You relied on the Lord" they say, "Why doesn't He save you?
If the Lord likes you, why doesn't He help you?"

It was you who brought me safely through birth; when I was a baby, you kept me safe.
I have relied on you since the day I was born, and you have always been my God.
Do not stay away from me! Trouble is near and there is no one to help.

Mark 8:31-37 The Cost of Discipleship (Good News Version)

Then Jesus began to teach His disciple: "The son of Man must suffer much and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and teachers of the Law. He will be put to death, but three days later He will rise to life." He made this very clear to them. So Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. But Jesus turned around, and looked at His disciples and rebuked

Peter. “Get away from me Satan” He said. “Your thoughts don’t come from God but from human nature!”

Then Jesus called the crowd and His disciples to Him. “If anyone wants to come with me,” He told them, “He must forget self, carry his cross, and follow me. For whoever wants to save his own life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for my and for the gospel will save it. Do people gain anything if they win the whole world but lose their life? Of course not! There is nothing they can give to regain their life.”

Hymn: Singing the Faith: 489: All I once held dear

All once held dear, built my life upon
All this world reveres, and wars to own
All I once thought gain I have counted loss;
Spent and worthless, compared to this.

*Knowing you Jesus, knowing you,
There is no greater thing.
You’re my all, you’re the best, you’re my joy my
righteousness,
And I love you Lord*

Now my heart’s desire is to know you more,
To be found in you and known as yours.
To possess by faith what I could not earn,
All-surpassing gift of righteousness.

Chorus

Oh, to know the power of your risen life,
And to know you in your suffering.
To become like you in your death, my Lord,
So with you to live and never die.

Chorus

Sermon

Introduction:

In our reading from Mark’s Gospel we have one of the toughest sayings of Jesus – perhaps His toughest - on the cost of being a disciple. There are some people who believe that being a Christian is a cushy number – an escape from the realities of life – a sort of ‘get out clause’. Carl Marx in his communist manifesto called faith ‘The Opiate of the Masses’ believing that anyone of faith was not living in the real world. He believed that we use our faith like a drug so that we are able to be happy with our lot. Well, he probably never read this passage from Mark’s Gospel!

Being a follower of Christ is certainly not an easy option – it is tough going at times and anyone who says otherwise hasn’t read this passage – where Jesus points out that to be a follower of His involves giving up everything – even his/her life if necessary.

The story of the farm worker:

There is a story of an old farm worker who was asked by a tourist how to get to a distant town. “Oh dear” he replied “It’s a really tough road. If I was going there, I wouldn’t start off from here!”

Paul’s attitude to suffering:

The fact is we often don’t have a choice about where we start. When Paul was writing to the churches that he founded, he knew that most of the congregations were having a really tough time, facing persecution, imprisonment and even death because of their faith in Christ – and they didn’t have a choice about it. He said “I consider that what we suffer at this present time cannot be compared at all with the glory that will be revealed to us”. And Paul knew a thing or two about suffering! He was thrown into prison on several occasions – he was shipwrecked – he was flogged, spat at, abused and run out of town several times. So he knew about suffering!!

Context

But, to understand this saying of Jesus, we need to put it into context. From spending most of his ministry in Galilee, at last Jesus turns towards Jerusalem. He was aware of the growing opposition to

Him from the authorities and also from the Romans. This would lead to his arrest, scourging and eventually to His death.

We know from John's Gospel, that people began to drift away from Jesus when the scribes, the chief priests and the Pharisees plotted with the followers of Herod to destroy Jesus.

People had had been delighted to followed Jesus to see His healings and His miracles but they were not at all keen of His telling them that he had to face death. So, Jesus warned them that to be His followers they might have to face persecution, imprisonment and possibly death. This was too much for some folk so they drifted away – which caused Jesus to say, somewhat plaintively to those who stayed “And will you also leave me?”

Some while ago, I read a little book called ‘All the Kings Men’ I think it was by William Barclay but I can't now find it - which spoke about what happened to the followers of Jesus after the Ascension. If the legends are to be believed, then the only one to survive into old age was the Apostle John. All the others died a martyr's death.

We are pretty sure that both Paul and Peter were crucified in Rome during the persecution under Nero, James died in Spain – Jesus' brother James, the leader of the Jerusalem church had already been martyred in Jerusalem. So, this was a timely warning.

Just before this happened, the disciples were asked, who do people say that I am? It is Peter who says “you are the Messiah”. The problem was that they were thinking of the wrong kind of Messiah. What they wanted was someone who would lead them against the Romans. Jesus needed them to understand the kind of Messiah He was, which led Him to speak about his suffering and then to add, that they too would suffer persecution!

Throughout the ages:

And it certainly didn't stop there. Throughout the ages, Christians have faced similar trials. In fact, what you may not realise is that there are now, in the 21st century, more Christian martyrs than at any other time in history! So, this warning is as relevant today as it ever was. If we faced such opposition, how would we cope? Or would we do what some of the followers of Jesus did, and simply drift away? I heard only the other day about some Chinese Christians. During the Chinese Communist purge under Mao Zedong in 1949 many churches were closed and Christians were either arrested or executed. There were a small group of Christians who were meeting privately in hiding. During one of these meetings, suddenly the doors opened and three communist soldiers walked in with weapons drawn. They shouted for all the Christians to line up against the wall to be executed. The soldiers then said ‘if you are not a believer you are free to leave.’ Some of the group fled the room. But the faithful group of believers joined hands and stood together and waited to die. Then the soldiers lowered their weapons and said “We are believers too and we wanted to find a group of Christians who were willing to die for their faith. May we join you? These Chinese Christians were willing to die for their faith – I wonder if we would be willing?”

Carlo Carretto:

We need to ask ourselves was this the way of Jesus? Carlo Carretto, writes in his book ‘Summoned by Love’ “Faced with man's poverty, faced with a flood of pain, He did not ask the Father to alter things.....He could have asked for death to be abolished.....He could have asked for earth to be transformed into an Eden, where no one could ever be hungry again: He did not do so. He could, He, the Omnipotent, the Well-Beloved, He could have Himself abolished pain and not endured it Himself: He did not ask for this. The real, the whole reality of the creation, made by God and corrupted by human disobedience, had to be accepted as it was. He had to start from this. To accept it as Calvary.....Jesus bowed His head and accepted reality.”

Free will:

To do anything else, would have resulted in humans losing their free will – and Jesus would not accept this. From the beginning of time, we have been offered a choice – to accept God or not. This is the essence of free will – would we really give this up?

Drifting away:

I wonder how many people you know who have simply drifted away from the Christian faith, where other things have become more important? We don't, at the moment at least, have to face persecution, but Jesus didn't just talk about taking up your cross and following Him – He also mentioned how we feel about our family and friends and how we need to put Him first in all things. That is really hard. Some people drift away because the clamour of family just becomes too great to resist – so we may simply drift away, without actually meaning to until it becomes a habit that we get into. Jesus warned against that as well – recognising that this a great pull away from Him.

Is there then no hope?

All this seems like doom and gloom – is there then no hope?

If I drift away is there then no going back? If we fail this test, if we simply don't measure up to what is demanded of us, will we be turned away for all time?

Kept out of the Kingdom?

So, are we kept out of the Kingdom if we fail the test – however many times we fail the test. Remember that Peter failed the test big time but not only did Jesus forgive him but gave him important work to do in the founding of His church.

However, if we do make a mistake – big time like Peter – if we left God and went our own way then He would be waiting for us to return, longing for us to return to Him. Remember the story that Jesus told of the prodigal son and how the father didn't give up on the son but was always waiting for him to return.

Prayer of confession:

(A moment's quiet reflection as we reflect on the week that has passed)

Father God, too often our light burns dimly in the darkness
And the message we hold is lost in that darkness.

**Forgive us Lord when we lose hope and joy,
Forgive us when we allow our anger to boil over,
When we lash out and hurt others,
Forgive us Lord when we fail to forgive**

We thank you Lord that you have promised to forgive when we come to you in true
repentance **Amen**

Prayers of Intercession

Almighty God, who cares for all people, whatever their race, colour or creed – believer or unbeliever, we bring to you those situations where people live in despair. Where storms of life threaten to overwhelm; where feelings of inadequacy and lack of love blight their lives – we bring them knowing that you care more than we can know or understand. *(We pray for people going through difficult times)*

Grant them your peace Lord

Lord of peace; bring peace where there is violence. We bring to you Lord all those who have fled their homes in fear. May they find compassion? We pray for those fighting for Freedom and all children who are brought up to believe in the power of the gun. *(We pray for all those places where there is violence – we continue to pray for Israel/Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Afghanistan etc)*

Grant them your peace Lord

Lord of Justice; bring justice where people live with injustice, for places where governments and soldiers impose their will. *(We pray for our brothers and sisters who are suffering because of their faith)*

Grant them your peace Lord

Lord of the Kingdom of God, who came into the world, not to condemn it but to save. Work with your people as we bring the message of your love and forgiveness to a needy world. *(We pray for our own churches – its mission and ministry)*

Grant us your peace Lord

Lord of healing and wholeness we bring to you all those who are known to us personally who are in need of your healing and power.....

Grant them your Peace Lord. Amen

Hymn: Singing the Faith: 443: Come let us sing of a wonderful love

Come let us sing of a wonderful love,
tender and true;
Out of the heart of the Father above,
streaming to me and to you:
Wonderful love
dwells in the heart of the Father above.

Jesus, the Saviour, this gospel to tell,
joyfully came;
Came with the helpless and hopeless to dwell,
sharing their sorrow and shame;
Seeking the lost
saving, redeeming at measureless cost.

Jesus is seeking the wanderers yet;
why do they roam?
Love only waits to forgive and forget;
home weary wanderer, home!
Wonderful love
dwells in the heart of the father above.

Come to my heart, O thou wonderful love,
come and abide,
Lifting my life till it rises above
envy and falsehood and pride;
Seeking to be
lowly and humble, a learner of thee.

Final Prayer said together:

God, give us your love,
Give us your joy,
Give us your peace,
That we may live life to the full
And in awareness of you.