

Worcester Cathedral – 7 September 2025
12th Sunday after Trinity – Eucharist 10.30 am

Readings Deut. 30, 15- end; Ps. 1; Philemon 1-21; Luke 14.25-33

- I find today's Gospel that we have just heard very troubling!
- Hate is a nasty word. We know a lot about hate in our world today.
- We live in a world where hate between peoples is very evident in Palestine, in the Ukraine, in Sudan, in the US in our own society.
- In the last few weeks we have had politicians of right and left fulminating about immigrants and asylum seekers overwhelming our society and advocating the most inhumane and hateful treatment.
- Those who work to support refugees and asylum seekers have been subjected to most frightening and hate filled threats.
- And yet thankfully there is a lot of love and compassion in our world.
- As many of you will know during the past year I have spent over 10 weeks in 3 different hospitals. I won't go into details here, but I experienced a great deal of love and care from the Cathedral community.
- I also experienced so much wonderful unconditional care and love from nurses and care assistants, many from the Indian sub-continent. We weren't known to one another, but they showed immense care and compassion for me and so many other patients.
- We think too of the medical volunteers who are trying to bring relief while under fire to the people suffering in Gaza.
- Sometimes we are surprised, yet I have recently read a book entitled 'Humankind' by Rutger Bregman that argues very convincingly that humans are in fact hardwired to be kind and compassionate to one another.
- Maybe that should not surprise us because we are created in the image of the God of love. The problem is we let lots of other stuff get in the way and hate appears.
- So to have Jesus telling us that to be his disciple we have to hate anyone, let alone our own families is just mind-blowing.
- You might say don't be so naive John, he didn't really mean hate, that was just hyperbole to shock his hearers, the great crowds who were just out to see a miraculous event or hear him preaching revolution.
- He was just trying to shock them into realising that to really follow him is no walk in the park, it is very demanding.
- Maybe, but hate is a strong word, what did he mean?
- How does it fit with his statement recorded by John at the last supper 'As I have loved you, so must you love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.'

- Discipleship is actually characterised by love, not hate for one another, even our enemies!
 - Indeed, the early church was known by the fact that the members clearly and evidently loved one another!
 - Yet Jesus seems to want to tell this crowd you have misunderstood what we are about here - you have got it wrong, if you really want to follow me, if you really want to be my disciples it's a tough call and you have to think about the cost.
 - Hate? All your relations, your close friends, even life itself.
 - Take up your cross.
 - Sell all your possessions
 - Several passages in this part of Luke's gospel also spell out the tough effects of following Jesus. Chapter 12, I come to bring division within families. Very similar to today's reading!
 - Also, I am reminded of the story of the rich young ruler, Luke 18.
 - How can I obtain eternal life?
 - Obey all the commandments!
 - Done that!
 - Sell all that you have, give proceeds to the poor.
 - The young man was sad, he didn't want to give it all up.
-
- Let's look at these three demands more closely.
 - Discipleship means to follow the way Jesus went, live the way Jesus lived. So can we clarify what Jesus meant by looking at his life?
 - I think Jesus' family probably found him hard work.
 - Remember even as a teenager he got carried away talking to the theologians in Jerusalem and his family missed him as they went home. He was rather dismissive of their concern - did you not realise I must be about my father's business.
 - Or the occasion when he was told family members were outside the house he was teaching in, he asked who are my mother and family? Doesn't sound very caring.
 - Also, his family must have been terrified by the way he annoyed the religious and civil authorities when he accused them of hypocrisy and cruelty to the poor.
 - Jesus certainly didn't consult his family about the way he lived. They were not allowed to deflect him from the work God had given him to do.
 - Only when his mission was nearly complete as he hung on the cross do we have a record of his concern for his mother, making sure his mother was looked after by John.
 - For us Family and friends make us feel we belong, for some they are people we can go to share our worries, maybe even rely on when real emergencies occur.
 - They can give us our identity, they can strongly influence the direction of our lives for good or ill.
 - Because we want to maintain good relations there is a real possibility that family and friends may try to influence us away from path we know God would have us take.

-
- Turning to possessions, Jesus certainly showed no evidence of possessions having any hold over him - the foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the son of man has nowhere to lay his head!
- Remember how he cleared the temple of the traders and money merchants. How dare you make my Father's house a temple of the consumer society? I sometimes wonder how he would view us.
- As he told the rich young ruler, possessions and money are distracting you from a life that is focussed on God and his way.
- In our society consumerism is a religion. Possessions are acquired to give us a sense of security, to distract us from the sad and meaningless aspects of our lives.
- Their acquisition or preservation can become the main focus of our lives. Ironically in reality they are mostly meaningless too. The rich young ruler did not realise this. Are we fooled too?
- In our world there are strong vested interests constantly pushing us to acquire new stuff, take holidays and trips that we hope will make us happy. We know that in addition to not giving us the contentment we crave, the process is destroying the planet and engendering hate for people who we think might reduce our prosperity.
- Take up your cross and follow me! What does this mean?
- What was meaning of the cross for Jesus?
- Because of his love for all humankind, he voluntarily accepted a life of undeserved suffering as an act of total solidarity with all the pain of the world.
- He could have walked away from it. He actively lived and taught in a way that set himself on a collision course with the religious and Roman powers.
- He constantly showed love and compassion for the unloved, the weak and suffering, the stranger in society. He identified with those the rest of society shunned.
- He knew that the way of the cross was his destiny. In it he demonstrated that God identified with all the suffering, pain and death that so characterises life on our planet.
- Pain and suffering which for the most part has no meaning whether due to physical disasters or bodily illness, and especially the cruelty human beings do to each other.
- Out of total love for the world and all humankind, God in Christ participated in it totally and accepted its consequence - death – at the hands of human beings who hated all he lived for and could not comprehend God's love for them.
- A seemingly absolutely horrifying outcome, but the consequence is that the wonder of Christ's resurrection signals the promise of love and new life for all. The ultimate paradox: The worst that life can bring results in the most wonderful outcome for all.

- What of our cross? Paul spoke of sharing Christ's suffering.
- To love as he loved us. As we have seen that costs. Are we up for it?
- Like him to accept the reality that the values of the life we long to live by, compassion and unconditional love, are frequently at variance with much of the world we live in.
- To accept the reality of our personalities with their strengths and flaws.
- To embrace and accept the negative things in our lives, perhaps health issues, suffering and pain, personality issues in ourselves or the folks that live around us.
- Aspects of our lives that we would like to be different that at times our reaction to such in life can be to rage at the apparent injustice of suffering whether from illness, accident or human cruelty, and become cynical and deeply resentful. This is natural but it will spoil our lives.
- At times Jesus recoiled from what he knew was before him. Remember his prayer in Gethsemane father please take this cup from me, nevertheless your will be done, and his despair that the disciples had gone to sleep.
- And while he prayed that God would forgive those crucifying him, his cry of dereliction, 'my God, my God why have you forsaken me', shows how he identifies with the feelings we have at times.
- The cross we are called upon to bear as Jesus' disciples may be to accept the reality of our lives, seek to change what we can in love and solidarity with Jesus, hand in hand with the man from Galilee, to steal a deeply meaningful phrase from an old song!
- We will fail from time to time, but we know God loves us unconditionally.
- That failure when it occurs will mean that may miss the joy of experiencing the benefits of God's love and sharing that love with others.
- But we can be confident that as we share in Jesus' death, we are being filled with God's resurrection love.
- Our world needs to rediscover that love desperately, how can we live other than his disciples, a community that loves one another as he loves us? - Let us put our hand in the hand of the man from Galilee.
- Amen