Pentecost 13 **Mark the Evangelist**
4/9/2022

Philemon 1-25
Psalm 139
Luke 14:25-33

If you follow Jesus, you'd better look good on wood

Sermon preached by Rev. Dr Peter Blackwood

What we have discovered after so many years of making long term plans is that we do certainly achieve many of our goals, but things happen over which we have no control and many of our plans go overboard in mid-stream.

I am told the new way to plan is called Scenario Planning. What will we do if this happens, or what will we do if that happens. In 2001 the Shell Oil Coy had done its planning like this. They were the only major oil company that had asked, 'what happens if there is a war in the middle east?' Shell was the only company that had an action plan to deal with the Gulf War.

Scenario planning requires looking ahead and asking, 'what are we going to do if this happens or if that happens? What will the consequences be, and what will our response be?'

I think Jesus must have been into a kind of scenario planning routine. His mission was going pretty well. The Gospel writers tell us that lots of people came to hear him on his lecture tours. Sometimes he had to do outdoor gigs because his house groups got out of hand – one time some people broke up the roof to let their sick friend in for healing (rotten queue jumpers).

Jesus had lots of admirers. Jesus had done a bit of scenario thinking about what might happen if these admirers became followers. What will the consequences be for them if my unpopularity with authorities gets me killed? So we have this interesting situation where Jesus is saying to his admirers, 'come and follow me, but make sure you have done your own scenario planning.'

You have come out today to admire what I have to say, and it is life changing stuff and you feel the urge to respond to the alter call and give your life in my service, but I am not going to be hear tomorrow. When you follow me tomorrow we are going to be 15km along the road, and two days after that we will be 30km away and who knows when we will be coming back this way.

If you follow me do you know where you will sleep tonight, or if there will be food tomorrow. And another thing, what will your family think about what you are about to do? Will they understand? You know they probably won't. You know they had hoped you would keep the family fishing boat going. Can you live with their disappointment in you? Can you bear to hear them calling after you, 'We thought you loved us, how can you hate your own family so much as to follow that Jesus of Nazareth?' Have you worked out the cost of switching from admiring to following?

'Shame' must have been a very powerful force in the society of Jesus. We have met it a few times in recent weeks – the shame of being sent to a lower place at the table, the shame of not giving hospitality when the disciples went on their mission in the villages and town, the shame of not giving a loaf of bread to a neighbour even when he asked in the middle of the night. Here it is again. Consider the shame if you have to return home

because you can't hack the pace of following Jesus. You don't start building a tower until you know you can pay for it. You don't declare war unless you have worked out how you are going to win it.

You don't follow Jesus into some kind of dream world. It is a real world – the most real of all worlds. Jesus summed it all up in terms of taking up your cross. Take up your cross and follow me. The Jesuit priest Daniel Berrigan was led away to an American federal prison for his resistance to the war in Vietnam. As he went he smiled at reporters covering the event and said, 'If you follow Jesus, you'd better look good on wood.' That's the kind of scenario planning Jesus suggests. If following him turns really bad, do you look good on wood?

That is how Jesus saw it for his day. How does following Jesus look today? Can we get away with admiring Jesus and still look as if we are following? I don't know what cross you have dragged into this church today, or what cross you left in the car park because it might look too ugly for this fine space. I don't know what it has cost you to be a follower, what it has cost your family, what resentment you have born over the decisions you have taken because you are a follower and not just an admirer. I don't know what crosses there are, but I know they are there.

The Christian's cross is raised by the contrasts between values. The pain of that contrast, the point that sees us hit the wood, is when our value is in such contrast that we feel separated from those we want to be close to. Jesus so much wanted Jerusalem to see things his way, through his spectacles of faith. He wanted to gather them all under his wings like a mother hen. It was that difference that saw him killed. That was the literal cross. As we try to view life through Jesus coloured glasses the contrast with those we want to love and who we want to love us defines the point of pain, the prick of the nails.

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