

This time I really can't blame anyone else for the passage I'm talking about – we were given absolutely free reign to choose a parable – any parable.

I didn't want to choose a familiar one and thought it would be interesting to pick one that we hadn't heard covered before.

Like Michael I was attracted by how short this one was – but the real reason it jumped out at me is that we are going through exactly this process as a PCC with the Transforming Trinity project. We are very carefully estimating what we realistically believe we can raise in funds from our own church family, what we might then be able to supplement this with - via grant applications and then going back to the architect to see what we can achieve with this realistic total. It would be totally irresponsible to start building something that we couldn't finish.

But as we have already heard in this series on the parables - we should not be taking them literally. Jesus spoke using analogies that his listeners – those people living in first Century Israel - would have been familiar with. So what was he really getting at here?

By starting “suppose one of you” indicates that the tower he mentions is not something exceptional, like a great monument, but an ordinary tower or small building. Something that someone of any age would have built to keep watch over their sheep, or in their vineyard to keep watch over their precious crops at harvest time.

And this is the first of 3 very short pithy parables where Jesus is teaching about the cost of discipleship.

Jesus is on his final journey to Jerusalem. He knows that when he arrives he will be arrested, tried and crucified. There are huge crowds following him. Like a modern day pop or film star there would have been people thronging around him who just wanted to be in his orbit. It was the thing to do. There were also those there expecting him to be the conquering king overthrowing the Romans and returning Israel to the happier times under the reigns of David and Solomon - but they hadn't understood that he wasn't that sort of king. He was there to save all mankind - but in order to do this he would have to suffer, be despised, rejected and put to death on a cross – laying down his life for all of us.

So he dramatically challenges the crowds around him to consider the cost of following him – the true cost of discipleship. I imagine he must have been frustrated - do you really understand? – add it up, count the cost, sort out your priorities.

This is not the 'gentle Jesus meek and mild' that is so often portrayed and so we may feel a bit uncomfortable when we delve into what he was getting at.

Jesus is telling His new followers that the Christian life is not easy. It's not as simple as just listening to his teachings and liking them like we can so easily do with postings on facebook, twitter or instagram. Being a true Christian involves hard work and absolute commitment.

For the early disciples, following Christ was extremely costly. Most of them were martyred losing their lives for their faith. We're fortunate that we are not being asked to make that sort of sacrifice - however many Christians in the Third World still are to this day.

But it is not enough to be carried along by the enthusiasm of the crowd either – each of us must ‘be prepared’. We must count the cost.

In our Common Worship liturgy each week we’re reminded - and I paraphrase – Our Lord Jesus Christ said: The first commandment is this – love the Lord your God with all your heart all your soul, your mind and strength and the second is love your neighbour as yourself. Jesus is clearly telling us to think first of our relationship with God, and then to think of everyone else second.

We must be ready to turn away from anyone or anything that prevents us from serving God. Such loyalty could drive a wedge between us and those around us and make us appear very odd in their eyes. Maybe we don’t want to lose friends or even family members by declaring we are Christians? Following Christ does not mean a trouble-free life.

We mustn’t half build our Christian lives and then abandon them because we didn’t count the cost of true commitment to Jesus.

I don’t think he is asking us to sell all we have and become travelling missionaries – but we can all take small steps – we can donate things we have to those who need them more than us – we can donate time and money to help those in need – we can support our own foodbank – we can help support those displaced by war. There are really many ways.

We shouldn’t hold back from following Jesus for fear of what it might cost – we are just asked to take it seriously – take heart, do our sums, set our priorities – not to fall by the wayside and be taken by surprise. Pray that with God’s grace we can remain faithful.

We need to take our spiritual lives seriously and not run out of energy or commitment. We shouldn’t get complacent and just do what is convenient, coasting along fitting it conveniently into our otherwise busy lives and perhaps just paying lip service to it, ticking some boxes. It needs to be genuine and perhaps we need to feel a bit uncomfortable at times as we step out of our comfort zone.

Like the tower builder we can choose whether or not to build, how big it will be or when we start – he had free will – so do we – it is our choice.

We need to have our eyes open and not blindly follow, we need to be intentional. And we should pray about it - as Psalm 143 says - ask God “show me the way I should go, for to you I entrust my life...teach me to do your will, for you are my God”.

As a true disciple we are putting ourselves entirely and absolutely at his disposal.

Ultimately whatever it costs – **it is** worth it.

We can’t afford not to follow Jesus.

Amen

Carol Elsassner, 29/5/22