

Bishop Michael – Presidential address

Diocesan Synod – 10 July 2024

Jesus Christ said:

“For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin c

“Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand. If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace.”¹

For many people, the idea of Christian faith does not seem to be firmly rooted in reality. Faith can be viewed as a naively optimistic, pie in the sky activity that has more to do with the perspectives of Pollyanna than the hard, solid realities of real life.

The sayings of Jesus that I read to you from the fourteenth chapter of Luke have no truck with such an understanding. Jesus invites his hearers to a crunching confrontation with reality. His examples are based in quantity surveying and military calculation. Neither of these subject areas are known as offering fertile ground for romantic hopefulness.

What Jesus is telling us is that ‘facts are favourable’. That doesn’t by any means imply that we’re always going to like reality when we encounter it. There’s much about the world’s reality that I could only wish to be otherwise – war, disease, famine are just three of the global realities that stalk people around our planet every day – brutally, painfully, mercilessly. But I have to recognise, often against my inclination, that such realities cannot just be wished away. Indeed, if we do so we can never deal with them. Putting our heads in the sand like ostriches never helps us grapple with things in the way that’s needed if we are ever to resolve them. It’s only when we admit reality, engage with it, take it head on that we can stand a chance of dealing with the often uncomfortable truths that it presents. Facts really are favourable.

And believe me, my dear brothers and sisters, we’re in this evening for a lot of them. Our agenda is stuffed with facts. Truths that often we’ll not like. Facts that we’ll often wish were otherwise. But realities that in our time and generation we need to deal with.

As members of the English nation, discussing the issues of finance that are going to be presented before us can often be toe-curlingly embarrassing and uncomfortable. I often encounter this when seeking to enter into negotiations with good, kind, generous Christian

¹ Luke 14; 27-33 - NRSV

people who need to be paid for a piece of work that will enable them to put food on the table for their families and keep a roof over their heads.

I have a simple strategy to help them through their distress. “Pretend you’re American for the next thirty minutes,” I tell them. “Being direct is one of their strengths as a nation, so don’t worry about talking straight or offending my feelings. Just tell it me as it is.”

Well tonight you might need to do that for a bit more than 30 minutes. I just hope you’ve got the stamina to keep going.

But let me share something further of Jesus’s words from Luke Chapter 14 with which I began this evening. You see, when Jesus offers his words about building towers or fighting wars, he’s not actually talking about finance. That would be relatively straightforward. No. Let me read you the words with which Jesus introduces the financial and resource examples that we listened to earlier. Jesus says, “Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” In introducing his images, Jesus isn’t talking about what’s in our wallets. He’s talking about our very lives. Of all that we are – every bone, every sinew, every thought, every relationship, every breath – all that he gave for us when he endured the cross. And Jesus’s ask? It’s that we are ready, if we’re asked, to give all these things for him – our very existence. Indeed he makes this clear in the throwaway line with which he follows his examples of towers and armies. He closes his words by saying “None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.” What’s in our wallets is the least of our problems.

The ultimate call of discipleship is rather to hold nothing back – so that every part of who we are is offered to Christ, so that in the offering we can be transformed – and become fully the people we were created to be. Daunting. Scary. Alarming. Yet to those who accept Jesus’s invitation to ‘follow me’ the way to a fulness of life that exceeds anything we can ever know otherwise.

So my dear friends, the facts are favourable. If also absolutely terrifying. So let’s summon up our courage, reach out and grab them and enter the fray.

Did I hear you say ‘Amen’?!

Michael Beasley

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