

Sermon for Sunday 4 September 2022 – The Twelfth Sunday after Trinity

Revd Graham Naylor, Curate

Deuteronomy 30.15–20; Philemon 1–21; Luke 14.25–33

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, would you come by the power of your Holy Spirit, speak to our hearts and minds as we explore the Bible readings that we've heard this morning in Jesus his name. Amen.

The readings that we've heard offer choices. If we'd have read our psalm as well, there's also a choice in there.

The Old Testament reading. We heard Moses talking to God's people who'd been wandering around the desert for 40 years, about to enter the Promised Land, and he puts the choice in front of them to follow God's ways or not, that would lead to life or death, blessing or curse. Really stark choices, seemingly no middle ground.

The Psalm, if we'd have read it, puts the challenge to follow the law of the Lord the way God wants us to live, rather than the ways of the wicked.

Slightly strange reading from Paul's letter to Philemon. Ask somebody afterwards about all the background to it because unfortunately I don't have time to explore it, but Paul offers Philemon a choice to welcome back Onesimus - what a great name - back as a brother in Christ rather than just his slave. Again, an all or nothing choice.

And then we come to our reading from the Gospel of Luke, where Jesus offers a really stark choice. Now, we've got to be careful with this because there is a tension between Jesus saying you've got to hate mother and father and brother and sister, and yet we're called to honour our mother and father. Some scholars would say Jesus is just using hyperbole to make a point, others would take a different view. But whatever he is using here, it is a stark choice. It puts following Jesus as a priority above all other priorities.

And Jesus is walking and talking. Part of the reason why I like being down on the floor rather than up there. Jesus walked and talked; I like walking and talking; but he's been walking around Galilee and he's on his way to Jerusalem and he's talking and there's a crowd around him and he's talking to them about what it is to follow Him, what it is to be part of the family of God in the Kingdom of God, as we call it. Now, he's not talking about just a way of thinking, a system of ideas or a way of feeling, an experience that you can have, or a way of acting, what we must do to pacify the deity that is to be worshipped.

Belief systems, religions, break down into those three categories - a way of thinking, a way of feeling, and a way of acting. But following Jesus, although it involves those things, is unique in that we follow the

person of Jesus. And Jesus is talking to this pool, if you like, of folk, this large crowd who are potentially interested in following him more seriously.

Talking of pools - a different type of pool. My children, who are now in their 30s, used to be competitive swimmers, and basically I didn't step back quickly enough when they asked would I be chairman of the club, and I ended up in that role, and we used to have a large number of people coming and saying, we want our young child who is having swimming lessons to join the competitive club. And we thought, okay, you really don't know what you are getting involved in. You think it's just adding a little bit to what you're already doing with your swimming lessons. Maybe instead of just a Tuesday night, you're going to add Saturday morning at 09:00. And we'd allow them to join the club.

And down the line there would be complaints from the parents about the amount of commitment that was needed. So we took a decision. We were doing trials. So if you imagine all these people that are around Jesus and say, we want to follow you, Jesus. And he then starts talking about the level of commitment that is involved. We did something similar with the swimming club. We met the children at the door and we said, you go down to the pool with the coaches and you're going to do the swimming trial, the practical bit of it. We're going to take the parents and we're going to go up and have coffee, and I would tell them just what was involved. I'd tell them it was great - if your child becomes a competitive swimmer; in our club, we had national swimmers and international swimmers, we were a very successful club.

They would be wide awake when they got to school because oxygen had been going around their brain. They were known as the wide-awake club. They did better in their exams because they'd learned self discipline. But the commitment was all in, because by the time they got really serious and really competitive, their alarm clock would be at least as early as 05:00 every morning, seven days a week, they would be in the pool swimming for something like 14 to 18 hours, doing about 60,000 metres a week. That actually might have been a session. But the level of commitment; I got to the point where I almost put people off. This is not just about a little bit more swimming, this is all or nothing.

The stark choice that Jesus offers is not a little bit more, bit of self improvement, a little bit more of behaving well, because you and I know we can't do that. You can try it, I doubt you'll manage it. I certainly don't.

One of the things that Jesus says is he says we have to carry our cross. We often talk about, 'Oh, I got this burden to carry, carrying the cross.' When Jesus talks about carrying your cross, he was talking about somebody who was carrying their cross to their own execution, where they were going to die. And that's the Christian life. The Christian life is dying and being raised to life.

That is what Leanne and Matt are doing today, in bringing Henry for baptism. Paul, writing to the church at Rome, says this; 'we have been buried by baptism into Christ's death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead, we too might walk in newness of life. See the extreme contrast? It's between death and life. It's not just about a bit of improvement.

So shall we do that? We're going to bury Henry in the waters of baptism and raise him to new life in Christ.