

From the Rector's Study, the Rev. Bryce Sangster
Sunday, September 4th, 2022, Pentecost XIII
Jeremiah 18:1-11 Psalm 139:1-5, 12-17 Philemon 1-21 Luke 14:25-33

This passage in the gospel today sounds harsh. But it might help to put it into context. The passage begins with a large crowd following Jesus. So maybe Jesus is wondering why so many are there with him. I would think he was figuring that many of the crowd were there out of curiosity and with no real commitment to what he was saying and what he was about.

This suggests Jesus was making the statements about hating members of one's family and life itself and carry the cross he is expressing his frustration about what the intentions were for most of the crowd gathered around him.

This may be more about a willingness to give up family, life, and possessions than actually giving them up.

I have mentioned in the past about Jesus setting the bar high, and he seems to have done so again. The spiritual journey is different for different people and different ways of expressing it. Different ways of understanding God. Diana Butler Bass in her book *Freeing Jesus* talks about different titles and different ways of understanding Jesus and her relationship with Jesus.

I use the word spiritual journey intentionally because it is just that, a journey. We are not expected to have it all together at the beginning, but that there be growth in our understanding and our actions.

Doctor Scott Peck talks about the different stages of spiritual development and growth. I am not quoting him directly but expressing my way of understanding what he has said.

The first stage I call the selfish or terrible twos. Thinking and feeling the world revolves around us and we are the centre of the universe.

The second stage I called the legalistic stage, God is judge and the 10 commandments. God sitting on our shoulder judging our every thought, word, and action.

The third stage, a questioning stage. Agnostic or atheist stage.

The fourth stage is returning to community with a sense of the spirit within.
Connecting both to God and community.

Doctor Scott Peck is right in saying there is a progression through the stages, but in reality, none of us completely live in one stage. We all fluctuate and move between the stages, sometimes in one stage and sometimes another.

I mentioned this because I believe Jesus' intention is not to make us feel guilty, but to empower us and give us the freedom and desire to continue along our spiritual journeys.

All of us are responsible for our own spiritual lives. Yes, in the church community we can get help and others can share their wisdom for our benefit, but ultimately it is all up to us ourselves to make the decision.

Jesus asks the question at one point, who do they say that I am? Then the second question who do you say that I am?

I think Jesus is asking us three questions, almost daily. Who do others say that I am? Who do you say that I am? And what are you going to do about it?

The third question, each of us will answer that question in our own way and in different ways. But I think there must be a commonality in our answers. It is moving from stage one to stage four. In other words, moving from ourselves being seen as the centre of our world to focusing on being in community and finding ways to care for and uplift one another. But how that gets expressed is different for each one of us, so we have to answer the question for ourselves today and perhaps everyday.

Amen

Go forth into the world in peace;
be of good courage;
hold fast that which is good;
render to no one evil for evil;
strengthen the fainthearted; support the weak;
help the afflicted; honour everyone;
love and serve the Lord,
rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit;
and the blessing ...