

Devotional Blog

Sunday 30th August

It's happened to all of us!

You're chatting away at some social or family gathering. It's going really well, you even have been given a compliment by the host, and then you open your mouth and put your foot in it!

This is exactly what happens to the disciple Peter in Matthew 16:21-28. He's just announced that Jesus is the "Messiah, Son of the living God", and has been named as the rock on which Jesus' church is to be built. He then moves at warp speed from being the rock for the church to being a stumbling block for Christ. Wow!

Peter receives a stinging and powerful rebuke "Get behind me Satan!".

But it's not hard to see why Peter got it wrong. There was nothing in Peter's understanding of the Messiah that involved suffering and death. He wanted Jesus to be a success not dead.

Poor old Peter's thinking and words have a strange echo of the Devil's temptation of Jesus in the wilderness (Matthew 4:8), offering Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour at low cost and no pain.

It's interesting to note that the Gospel tells us that with this incident Jesus "began to show" the disciples. You see, this was an extremely hard lesson about suffering and death, and it was clearly going to take more than one session for it to sink in.

We, with the benefit of the fuller Gospel story, know that Jesus died for Peter and for us. He overcame death and sin so that we might be

saved, and that salvation was the product of God's love for us. God paid the price himself.

This revelation of Jesus' death provides one of the most unequivocal statements of Christian discipleship anywhere in the New Testament. It is remarkable for its brevity and its extremity.

Jesus offers crucifixion to those who want to follow him.

Yes, we are to become cross-bearers! Scary isn't it?

Now, cross-bearing Christians will seldom literally pay the price of their faith with their blood, although we need to remember and pray for the many who suffer in this way.

We are called to give up a self-centred life and strive for a Christ-centred life. This is not easy. The whole of western society is organised on self-centred individualism, it's the way the markets work, it's the way competition works and the way much of our politics work. We are to reject all this!

Our cross-bearing is to be one of quiet self-sacrifice and compassionate service to the needs of others. We are called daily to turn away from easy street and walk the narrow way.

Following Jesus involves standing with those who are weak, opening the doors to those who are unacceptable, loving those who are unlovely. We are to live a life that is the polar opposite of our ego-centric culture.

Oh, and we will get it wrong!

Let's face it, if Peter who had been given the keys of Heaven failed, we should assume that we will not always get it right.

Yet, joy of joys, the forgiveness that flowed over Peter will flow over us. Why? Because God loves us and wants us to be with him. Our sense of meaning in this broken world, our source of happiness is God's love and grace.

Our cross-bearing is not just a personal activity. It is a community task, a job for the church. Jesus wants us to follow him, he wants the church to follow him.

Softly, the voice of Christ says “follow me, put me at the centre of your life, the centre of your church, and I will be with you in the good and the dark days. I will lift you when you fall, and I will take you home. I will lead you to be with the Father forever.” Amen.

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