

Following Jesus

Family Service Talk

Matthew Chapter 16:21-28

From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.' But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.' Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?

'For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.'

If I went into Bedford today and asked some people who are you following what do you think they would say ?

They would most probably think of Twitter ! Perhaps it would be a film star, or a pop singer

What happens when you follow somebody?

You received little bits of information about

- Where they are
- What they are doing
- What they think about things

As a follower you might be interested in what they say. You might even make decisions based on what they say. But you can choose what you like and what you don't like. If you want to you can just ignore it. President Donald Trump does the whole Twitter thing a lot !

Today in our Gospel reading we hear all about what it means to follow Jesus

Jesus tells his disciples that if they want to follow him then they have to take up a cross.

Let me explain what that means.

Jesus knew that people were angry about the things which he was talking about, (he would have tweeted but they didn't have social media in those days). He knew that what he was saying was going to cause trouble, the powerful religious leaders were getting jealous and he believed they would eventually kill him, because they saw him as a threat to the established religion of his day.

What was it that caused the Jewish religious leaders to be so angry with Jesus ?

1. Jesus said that God's love extended to all people, not just the Jews but even those like the Samaritans who were hated by the Jews!
2. Jesus said that you didn't have to go to the temple to offer sacrifices to be forgiven by God, he forgave people himself
3. Jesus said that old rules like the Sabbath and food laws weren't important anymore

All of this undermined the Jewish religion and to make matters worse Jesus was much more popular because he performed miracles, raised the dead and made sick people better

Jesus said that if anybody wanted to be his follower then they would have to be prepared to be fully committed. They couldn't pick and choose what bits of his teaching to like and which to ignore, you had to be committed like he was.

Now has anybody heard the number 666? Some people think of the Book of Revelation Chapter 13 where they hear that this number is the number of a beast . There is actually something much more serious associated with this number in John Chapter 6 Verse 66 we read that after Jesus had been talking about his death

Many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him

This is a really significant verse, people who followed Jesus, decided that they no longer wanted to follow him anymore. They counted the cost of following Jesus and they decided that it was better to turn back because his teachings were too hard.

Those who did follow Jesus went on to achieve amazing things. The world was changed but some of them did indeed pay for their faith with their own lives like Jesus

So what does it mean to follow Jesus. Well in the passage from Romans today the Apostle Paul speaks about what kind of lives followers of Jesus should have. We might never have to choose life and death in regard to our faith but that does not mean that we can just do as we please. There We can easily make a list of the characteristics which should be a part of a Jesus follower.

Following Jesus

In the footsteps of the Cross

Guidance from the Bible

Romans Chapter 12

1. Be sincere in loving others
2. Hate what is evil and do what is good
3. Love one another with mutual affection
4. Outdo one another in showing respect
5. Serve the Lord, work hard and do not be lazy
6. Be happy because you have a real hope
7. Be patient in your sufferings
8. Share everything with God in prayer
9. Share what you have with those in need, extend hospitality to strangers
10. Ask God to bless those who treat you badly
11. Share the happiness of those who are happy
12. Share the sorrow of those who are sad
13. Live in peace with one another
14. Do not think of yourself as more important or wiser than others
15. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but do what everyone thinks is right
16. Do everything possible to live at peace with everybody
17. Never seek to take revenge, leave it in God's hands
18. Care for your enemies and so overcome evil with good

