

Take Up Your Cross

a sermon preached on the

16th Sunday after Pentecost

31 August 2008

at

St Luke's in the City, Christchurch

by Fr Jim McKenna
priest assistant at St Luke's
& chaplain to Bishopspark

Lecton: Jer. 15: 15-21; Matthew 16: 21-28

In the Gospel we read of the faithfulness and commitment that is commanded by Christ of those who follow Him.

Jesus said to His disciples:

“Unless you take up your cross and follow me you cannot be my disciple.”

This statement by Jesus is so often misconstrued.

We often hear someone say, ‘he or she has a cross to bear’, because of illness or other situations. This is NOT what Jesus meant at all. He was referring to our commitment in our choice to follow Him, despite the difficulties, and, perhaps, persecution this would involve.

The commitment required of us is to share in Christ’s Passion, which was not a suffering in isolation. The Passion He suffered, carried the hardships and pains of every person who has been the innocent victim of violence, envy, power struggle, political policy or greed. His way of salvation was not at a safe distance, removed from the messy, dirty side of life. Our salvation was not won through idle talk or debates. It was won on the Cross at Calvary, and stands in solidarity alongside all human pain and distress.

The Cross was the expression of insane hatred, bitterness, envy, scorn and savage cruelty. But through Jesus, the Cross is healed, so that now it expresses love, and arms that are open in a worldwide embrace. What was once a curse, is now the symbol we use in Blessing as disciples of Christ.

We are called to transform humanity into God’s family through the power of the Holy Spirit. This is a work of justice-making, of peace-making, and of the liberation of the people. We are saved, not as individuals, but as people. Christians are committed to the risk of deep sharing and surrendering to each other in trusting love.

As disciples of Christ, we should be willing to change. The call is to build relationships across previously conditioned boundaries of age, gender, class, and race. We are to be a people of vision and hope. These are the challenges which we will experience when we answer the call of Jesus to “take up our cross and follow Him”. There will be tasks which we will not like doing, but know that we have to do them if we want to be faithful to our commitment and responsibilities. Sacrifice is not an easy road. The only thing that makes sacrifice easy is love. Love enables us to turn the stumbling block into a stepping stone.

The road to Jerusalem brought Jesus to Calvary. But it didn’t end there. It leads us to the Easter Resurrection. Jesus supports all who answer His call and are willing to follow Him down the road to sacrifice, and shares His Easter victory with them.

Amen.

References: Matthew 16:21-28
Flor McCarthy
S. O’Flynn
D.J. O’Leary

j.p.mckenna@xtra.co.nz