

What God Asks!

Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time

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Sometimes, it is easy to get the idea that Christianity is a doddle. Just come to Jesus and all your problems will be solved!! Says the evangelist. And he or she is right, but at the same time he is wrong. Faith is not a hard step. We turn to Jesus and trust in him and we literally make our reservation in heaven at that time but it is that time that is between faith and heaven that is oft times so difficult. This is why Jesus refers to the faith journey as taking up your cross and following, it is why he warns his would be followers, that to say yes will have a cost and like the cross that we are to take up it is all consuming.

I have been racking my brains, because I remember hearing an absolutely brilliant sermon on this passage which for me put all this into context and would love to share these thoughts with you - but as I say I remember hearing the sermon, but I can remember only one or two points of it. What I do remember is that it took us to the position of the man taking up the cross and spoke of how his life would be shaped by that event - He had a singular future - indeed the cross filled that future, that he could only look one way, and that there were no distractions from the moment. There were a few other points along this line of thought but I can't for the life of me remember what they were. Perhaps you might like to take this as a challenge over the next few days to meditate on this passage and the meaning of taking up a cross in what is our lifestyle and situation.

But as Malcolm Fraser said, "Life wasn't meant to be easy!" And certainly, in the Christian walk, we cannot expect that it will be plain sailing. And to be fair, Jesus never said that it would be - He only said, that He would be there with us always.

But perhaps this audience can be sympathetic to this aspect of the Journey - Farmers, they have a rough trot at times. Sure, there are the good times, but the lessons I have learnt about farming is that things can go wrong and just when you think that everything that could possibly go wrong has, then something else critical fails. The drought is broken by floods.

But hardship is no reason not to fulfil our calling. For there are joys in doing this and there is a lesson that we learn as we grow, to somehow find the joy in the hardship and not to let the hardship win. I worry about the rising generation. Not that there are not good kids, but we are bringing them up in a culture that says if it gets too hard, then give up. If it is not fun, give up. Indeed, why bother at all. Certainly, this leads to the epidemic of suicides that we see amongst our youth but more than this, places our very society at risk. We are creating a very soft generation, happy to leave the challenges to the chosen few. I remember a cub, who acted tough, but he baulked when he saw a challenge before him. To try something new or to do something new he is not interested. He is a product of this new generation and I wonder if they will be able to stand like the generations in the past if our way of life were to be challenged or were to be faced with the situation of Shackleton and other heroes.

And will they be there to carry on our church for subsequent generations? Will they be able to take up the vision of the Cross and lead others to faith?

I am beginning to sound like I should be sitting in a rocking chair on a porch somewhere - but these are legitimate concerns.

When we were in college, we used to take our children on adventures - and I remember one day packing up our car and heading south on the Putty Road. (It is sort of like heading up into one of the 'tracks'). In due time, we stopped for a break and as our kids had a bit of a walk around, we got out the chairs and the thermos and make ourselves a cup of tea. Then came the sudden realisation - We had turned into our parents!! Having passed the milestone of another year, I realise that this is pretty much the fate of us all. We become our parents. As someone said to me after a funeral of the last of the family, we are now the generation that sits around at the family parties and talks of the old days.

This is the destiny of us all, but it is also to the solution to the concerns above. The greatest risk to our children's faith is not the drug culture, or television, or rock and roll or mutant ninja turtles - **IT IS US**. As the older generation, the most certain way to influence our children to follow in our footsteps of faith is to live out this faith-filled life before them. Our children will be ready to take up their crosses when they see us do so and to live beyond the hardships to the joys of heaven. Our children may rebel at the idea, particularly in the teenage years, but it is the values that we live by that will ultimately be passed on. They might not always take the same form, but they win out in the end.

So the future is in our hands, to take up the message of the Gospel. Let us pray that we have the ability and the motivation to do so. And also to pray for our children that they might find the way as well.

AMEN