

Families!

[Jeremiah 20⁷⁻¹³; Psalm 69⁸⁻¹¹] Romans 6¹⁻¹¹; Matthew 10²⁴⁻³⁹

*Whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me.
[Matthew 10³⁸]*

I confess that I thought that Father's Day was last week. I always remember the class in Corby when I had indoctrinated them in the simple truth that, in the UK, it is 'Mothering Sunday' and not 'Mothers' Day' and so one hand when up and asked, with all seriousness, 'why isn't it fathering Sunday then?' I am not sure that my explanation that one was a noun and the other was a verb was helpful!

Instead of the saccharine indulgence of a day designed to keep card makers in profit and (this year, at least) Gin makers in business, Jesus, in the Gospel, challenges us: **I have come to set a man against his father... whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me!** You wouldn't sell many cards with that as the inscription!

When I began preaching I was given the advice that any sermon should be able to be summarised in one short sentence – for today it is: our allegiance to God in Jesus Christ is more important than any other. If you have a problem with that, you have a problem with God!

- ✘ Paul is blunt about it: **do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death?** That death in baptism was an end to who we were and then we were resurrected from baptism – **if we have died with Christ we believe that we will also live with him.** That leads Paul to the conclusion. **So you also must consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.**

If only this wasn't the either or choice that it really is – we certainly want the benefits of the new life in Christ, but the problem is that most of us enjoyed some of the things that belong to the life that died in baptism and we keep resuscitating that corpse!

- ✘ At the heart of Jesus teaching in Matthew's Gospel is who do we fear most – do we fear what others think about us or do we fear God more? It is knowing our place in making decisions – **a disciple is not above the teacher**, so Jesus must take precedence. It is about knowing that God cares for us more than we care for ourselves – **even the hairs of your**

head are counted, and knowing this helps us move beyond the fear that we may have of what others think of our being believers. There can be no secret disciples – **everyone who acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.**

That brings us to the rather uncompromising and uncomfortable passage where Jesus says, **Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother... Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.**

To understand this we have to accept that Jesus priority is **peace**, but it is peace with God first of all. My old tutor, Dr Dick France said here,

Jesus does not come to poison family relationships but rather brings a division, regrettable but inevitable, between those who respond to his mission and those who reject it.

Where there is a conflict or where there is a choice, it has to be God first.

- ✘ The challenge to disciples has always been; **whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me.** Jesus knew what he was saying, evidence of Roman crucifixions were always on show and he knew what was ahead of him and how those who heard him would know what this meant retrospectively.

If we get this sorted in our minds and in our living then everything else falls into place!

None of us like to be told hard truths. Just look at what has happened with COVID-19. We were told to stay at home; not to travel; to maintain a 2 metre distance; etc. If that had happened and everyone had done it, the virus would have had no-where to go and the crisis would be over. We didn't like what we were told and we did it our own way – and the crisis continues!

God doesn't want us to send a Fathers' Day card to show our love and commitment but for us to do what we are told – to do what is good for us – and put him first!