

Multiple Choice Faith!

Isaiah 53^{4-end}; Psalm 91^{9-end}; Hebrews 51-10; Mark 10³⁵⁻⁴⁵

Whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. [Mark 10⁴⁴]

Christianity would be much more attractive if we had more choices about how we lived our faith. If we could pick and choose a bit more, life would be so much better for us:

- On Sunday we choose worship
- On Monday we choose to read our Bible
- On Tuesday we choose to pray
- On Wednesday we choose to obey God's moral law
- On Thursday we choose to love someone we don't like
- On Friday we choose to be a servant
- On Saturday, if we don't have anything better to do, we choose to share our faith

The sad truth is that, for some who call themselves Christian, even this would be an improvement on what had been the case.

I think that the thing that connects all our readings today is fairly obvious:

- ✠ The reading from Isaiah is one of the Servant Songs, pointing forward to the Messiah - the one God would send to be **wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all**. The purpose of this servant act of self-sacrifice was to **bear their iniquities** and that he **bore the sin of many**.

This is our role model in commitment and service of others!

- ✠ Hebrews gives us the New Testament perspective on this. In the Jewish Temple tradition a priest **is put in charge of things pertaining to God... to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins**. But, being human, **he must sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of other people**.

Jesus was a different sort of priest - after **the order of Melchizedek** (the one to whom Abraham bowed), speaking of Jesus divinity and humanity. Jesus had no need to make sacrifice for his own sins, but served those who were sinners as he **offered up prayers and supplications**. Jesus task was that **he learned obedience through what he suffered** and that **he became the**

source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

Without this self-sacrifice we remain unforgiven - Jesus didn't have to do this for his own sake and so it is the highest act of altruism.

- ✠ The Gospel has the almost comic scene of Jesus the servant being faced with ambitious disciples looking for status and preferment: **grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory**. It is a confident statement of faith in that this is where they see Jesus and a fatally flawed ambition that they think the Kingdom of God operates like this.

Jesus first response is to show that they weren't up to the commitment he had to make: **are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with?** That will come, Jesus predicts, but they had a way to go before they could understand it or accept it.

You can imagine the row that there was when the other 10 found out, but Jesus cuts across the argument: **whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all**.

If you are a disciple, a follower of Jesus, take note: **the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many**. If that was good enough for Jesus, then that's what is expected of us.

Those from other faiths find the Christian approach to faith derisory: we do not demand prayer 5 times a day; we have no strict rules on meat or alcohol; we don't confine our priests to a temple with the sole task of conducting a cycle of daily ceremonies and the continual reciting of sacred texts: we do religion-lite!

How do we respond: do I insist that we change what we do and insist that you join me for morning and evening prayer or excommunicate you? Do I test you on what you have read or how your prayers have been answered in a week? Do I insist that you confess your sins so that your moral conduct is always at the forefront of your mind (and I twist the thumbscrews of guilt and engender fear)?

You will be relieved - apart from the fact that this would decimate the congregation - it is a contradiction of God's grace that is freely given.

Yet, the practice of our faith needs to be more slave-like, having surrendered our rights to a joyful commitment to those things that build our faith, build the Church and build up one another.