

Trinity 13

Have you ever been in a situation where in order to achieve the thing you want to do, or need to do, you have to go through a bit of discomfort, perhaps a bit of fear, in order to get to the other side and achieve it?

Looking back in life it might have been that time when you took your feet off the ground for the first time, when you're learning to ride a bike. Not easy, but when you get through it, then comes that feeling of great freedom as you whizz along on your bike. You have to go through a feeling of nervousness and reluctance before you finally commit yourself.

Or it may be jumping out of a plane with a parachute, and going through that stomach churning fear, as we leave the plane behind and jump into thin air!

Has anyone ever done that? Well if you have your braver people than me! Although talking to a few friends who have parachuted, they say what a great ecstatic feeling it is once your parachute has opened and your floating down to earth! But no, still not for me!

Or maybe, keeping our feet firmly on the ground, we decide to do something different with our lives, a change of profession perhaps, and we have to come to terms with leaving behind what is familiar and safe and cast out into the open sea with it's waves and currents, until the wind catches our sails and enables our journey, with all it's risks and challenges.

Not all plain sailing but we're moving in a chosen direction.

So what about the life of a Christian? If we really want to live a Christian life and give it our all, do we have to go through a bit of discomfort and fear and leave behind the security of our feet on the ground as we put them on the pedals? Do we leave behind the safeness of the plane or familiarity of the shore?

Well it seems according to Jesus in Matthew's gospel that we do. Because that's what Jesus does. In order to do what he needs to do, Jesus leaves behind the more comfortable and familiar and faces discomfort and fear.

'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.'

Well that really is going through something! But what happens on the third day? He is raised from the dead.

Not that Peter is impressed. He challenges Jesus on this. And it's not surprising because for Jesus' Jewish disciples, the idea of a prophet, a leader, a Messiah who is God's anointed one, the idea of someone like this having to suffer and be killed is inconceivable. The two surely don't go together?

Well yes they do and Jesus ticks Peter off and says he is setting his 'mind not on divine things but on human things.'

And it doesn't stop there with Jesus. Jesus told his disciples.

'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves, 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.'

Jesus is saying to the disciples and to us, that if we really want to follow him, and follow him all the way, then we must be prepared to experience something of the passion, something of Jesus' suffering and dying. We must with all it's challenges, try to live a sacrificial life.

We see in our reading from Exodus that Moses had to leave behind the comfortable and familiar things when he was called by God from the burning bush to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. 'Will the Israelites believe me when I'm challenged?' "What shall I say to them?" asks Moses. And we learn later that Moses wasn't overly keen on being in the limelight in front of great crowds. But he answered God's call. He went through the nerves and the fear to achieve the good.

So we too must respond to God's call and sometimes face discomfort and fear.

Paul's letter to the Romans sets challenges to the early church, when he echoes the words of Jesus. 'Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.' How easy might that be for us? A challenge certainly. 'Rejoice with those who rejoice.' Well that might be ok, but, 'weep with those who weep? Well it's within our capabilities as we can naturally have compassion and see other people's plight. But how much do we want to throw in our lot and be side by side with those who suffer? And how much are we prepared to challenge our sometimes false sense of what we are and associate with those who might be considered lowly? The challenges continue as Paul says not to 'repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.' Thus remembering Jesus tells us, not to resist one who is evil but turn the other cheek. 'We must not avenge ourselves'? We might say, 'It gets more challenging!' But we hear in our reading that vengeance is for the Lord. So rather if our enemies are hungry we must feed them. If they are thirsty we must give them something to drink.

We know we have the capability to do all of these, as human nature reflecting God can be so good. But they are challenges. These instructions might make us feel uncomfortable and it's far easier to keep our feet off the pedals and on the ground. It's far easier to stay in the plane and not jump out. It's far easier to stay where we are in our life. It's far easier to live life for us.

But Jesus says. 'deny yourselves, take up your Cross and follow me.' He doesn't just say that because he wants to see us suffer. He says it because he wants the best for us. Remember if we go through the uncomfortable, deny ourselves and face it's challenges, we are following the path that Jesus trailed before us, with the weight of his Cross bearing down on him. When we feel that weight, we will know that Jesus shares that weight with us. And when that weight has gone, the nerves and the fear will have been worth it, as we feel the ecstasy of floating on our parachute to the ground; the whizz and excitement of riding our bike, and the re-assurance of the wind catching the sails of our boat and taking us to the place where we need to be. And in that place we will be with the God who loves us and doesn't want us to be left behind.

Amen