

## Introduction.

I think that most of us have the secret fears that if we take seriously following Christ, it will mean that we will lose out on life. We tend to see life as having directions in which we could go. There is the "**Jesus Way**" in life and **Our Way**- which we perceive to be less demanding, offering more freedom and happiness, greater control over our own lives. In contrast it seems to us that the "Jesus Way:-

While it may be a holy life -- it will not be happy one.

While it may be a worthy life -- it will not be a wealthy one.

While it might be a fruitful life -- it will not be a full one

At first blush the gospel passage this morning seems to reinforce that view.

***"Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother and even life itself cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."***

The key concept is life. What is real life and what are its characteristics?

Peter thought that he had chosen life with a capital "L". Months earlier Jesus came by the shore of Galilee and said to him ***"follow me and I will make you a fisher of people"***. Peter began to follow Jesus, he started on the "Jesus Way", and so began a demanding yet exciting life. He witnessed the growing popularity of Jesus. Great throngs strained to hear the words and be healed by this Wonderful Teacher. As time went on Peter felt he was on the inside track – a special confidant of Jesus. He witnessed some amazing things, Jesus walking on water, calming a storm on the lake, feeding folk from virtually nothing- all culminating in that glorious moment when Peter, in answer to Jesus question, ***"Who do you say that I am?"*** replied ***"You are the Messiah"***. Jesus responded by telling Peter that he would become foundational in the church that would come into being. Peter must have thought to himself this is all working out wonderfully. The "Jesus Way" fits in with all my desires. This really is the life.

But then *Jesus began to say that suffering, rejection by the religious leaders, arrest and execution lay ahead.* Peter must have thought, why this path? Why doesn't Jesus choose life – the bright, thrilling path of popularity and power, rather than death? Why doesn't he wow the crowds and religious leaders with few more miracles and be swept into power on an irresistible tide of popular acclamation? Then he would have real authority (and so would I). So, he decides to straighten Jesus out. Forget this dark, painful way that you have been speaking of –all this downer stuff about rejection and failure. if you do this your mission will lose momentum with the people. So take the other road, aim for popularity, winning everyone over.

Jesus, not only rebukes Peter, but tells him, you just don't understand about real life Peter – Oh you think you do, but it is God's way- God's Life **FOR US** that really counts.

If we allow safety, ease, comfort, security considerations to determine our decisions,– then we die a little bit every day. These are illusions. We cannot control our lives- our health, lifespan or continued employment cannot be guaranteed. But also we have our spiritual DNA, giving us the potential to become that person who God has made, equipped and called to be. If we let ourselves be shaped by considerations of safety, security and comfort, over time we become **“spiritually mutated”**- our characters are damaged and suppressed - we become unreal because we are ungodly –not who God created and called us to be.

Jesus knew who he was and what he was called to in God. Peter’s “easier way”, if followed, would have “morphed” Jesus from the Suffering Servant, achieving salvation for the world and then being vindicated, to a popular religious/political leader with a revolutionary agenda, constantly aware of, and sensitive to, the shifting winds of public opinion.

Who I am today is in large part the result, of choices I have made over the years- saying “Yes “ or “No” to God. Our Christian formation-that is the development of Christian character- is an ongoing cooperative process between ourselves and God.

That is true for each one of us here today. It was Aristotle who said  
Sow a choice – reap a habit:  
Sow a habit – reap a character:  
Sow a character – reap a destiny:

Christian discipleship **does** mean that we are called to **“deny ourselves”** by choosing the way of Christ. But that does not mean developing masochistic tendencies, rather it involves saying “No” to that unreal image, that phantom, we are building up whenever we try to conform ourselves to anything other than who God intends us to be.

So often the church has presented Christian discipleship as a miserable, humorless, grim, unattractive option. Why is this? Perhaps because some church leaders have sort to control people by these means. But at a deeper level this happens when our image of God is distorted. As a kid whenever went to a fair, I would always go into the” Hall of Mirrors”. Variety of curved mirrors which distorted my size and features (as I get older might be grateful for that!). At a deep level, not rational but emotional, many of us assume God to be the great, cosmic sadist who does not love us or care for our welfare. **“How can I make them miserable”?** thinks this god. **“Ah! this young woman would be utterly fulfilled in marriage – I will call her to the religious life as a nun!”** In reality God is utterly committed to each of us in love. Growth, our growth in God is not effortless and without struggle, but that ongoing transformation moves us ever closer to becoming the real me and you. How is it accomplished? One choice, one step at a time along that Jesus road.

When we become a disciple of Jesus we step into Christ’s light – we begin to discern the truth about ourselves, who we are in Christ, loved and accepted. Also, in that

revealing light we are free to begin to see ourselves as we are – imperfect, fearful, weak creatures, yet those who God longs for and plans to transform and heal. To continue as a disciple is to be a person in process – in Biblical language we are set on becoming “**more and more conformed to the image of his dear Son**”.

### **Conclusion.**

The call of Jesus to become (and to continue) as his disciple is not a call to gritting our teeth and stoically embarking on a life of perpetual responsibility interspersed with lots of dying to our most cherished longings and hopes. Rather it is a call to real life – dying to those fantasies which are unhealthy and crippling restrictive. It is certainly a demanding life, involving facing up to ourselves as we are, and being committed to ongoing growth, healing and inner transformation. It is the only life worth living. It is the real thing. Amen