

Lk 14:25-35 Chad's 070925

CHOICE OR CIRCUMSTANCE?

I guess you like me have by now faced many new starts in your life journey. **My new starts** have included a move as a young teenager with my family from Sydney to Adelaide & a new high school; beginning my career as a teacher then a school principal & the subsequent moves around SA; our marriage, then parenthood; Karel's diagnosis with what could have been a serious illness & the stressful but successful treatment that followed; my calling to ordained ministry, then of course our serving in various parishes; & of course our finding of you, our true faith family here at Chads. Now some of these new starts have been by choice while in others I've had no choice, as the new start has been a consequence of my life circumstances at that time, but in other new beginnings I suppose there's been a bit of **both circumstance & of choice**. /But each of these new starts has had both **expected & unexpected consequences** which have had a bearing on my life in the years to follow. Indeed one of my new beginnings arising from a change in circumstances, that of Karel's illness, had truly life changing consequences, in my choosing to follow my call to ordained ministry! And in this life changing new beginning my strong sense of God's all embracing love, palpable in the love of family and others, has guided and carried me through.

I'd like you to reflect for a moment on the 'new starts' you've made in life. / Which of your new starts been by choice,/ & which have been compelled by life's circumstances/? And has any of these new starts been truly life changing?/

Today's scripture readings reflect this **idea of starting over in our journey to fulfill our Christian purpose as humankind in the words of the prophet Micah in our Bible verse for tge month, to 'do justice, love mercy & walk humbly with our God'** . And both

Jeremiah and the psalmist use imagery to show how we are to draw on the presence of our loving God in making **new beginnings** in doing God's will to make a better world.

Then Luke's words in the **gospel tell us how both choice & circumstance can bring us to these new starts in life**. Luke today uses **two similar parables, but each makes a slightly different point**. In the **first parable the builder of the tower is faced with a choice**, to build or not to build as he chooses, but Jesus says 'sit down and reckon whatever you can afford to follow me in your choice'. In the second parable however, the **circumstances** of the king being invaded mean that he **must do something**. The king really **has no choice**, he must build his army or be invaded! And Jesus says to the king here 'sit down and reckon whether you can afford to NOT build your army! Hardly a choice!/'

Whether the new start is due to choice or circumstance, then, the Gospel reminds us that we are to **think about what may be involved and to be aware that there will be consequences**. There WILL be a cost, whatever our decision is on our journey. Or to extend Jeremiah's imagery of the potter and the clay, we are not to be mindless and passive to God the potter's hands. In making a conscious decision to follow God's will, we are to first consider **the likely costs of** making that decision. And the cost of following Christ's way of love may be extreme. Just consider the opening words of today's Gospel where Jesus is clear about the price of choosing to follow him: 'Whoever comes to me and does not leave father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes even life itself, cannot be my disciple' (v25). Harsh words indeed from Jesus./

Clearly, the words 'hate father and mother, etc.' are not to be taken literally. It is a Semitic way of making a strong point. So Jesus here

uses hyperbole, or exaggeration to make his point. Jesus of course was not teaching literal hatred, for he had earlier commanded his followers to love ... even their enemies (6:27)! So it was impossible that he was telling them to literally hate their nearest and dearest! So again, Jesus is reminding us here that there will be a cost, even perhaps to our relationships. But God's guiding compassionate presence will be with us as we count the cost in following the way of his son, in his Love.

The change Jesus calls for in doing his will of love in the world is more of a transformation. The word **change normally refers to a new beginning** arising from a choice. But in contrast, the **mystery of transformation more often happens not when something new begins, but when something old falls apart. RPT** The pain and chaos of something old falling apart **invites the soul to listen at a deeper level, and sometimes forces the soul to go to a new place.** Let's face it, most of us would never go to new places in any other way. The mystics use many words to describe this chaos: **fire, dark night, death, emptiness, abandonment, or trial.** Whatever it is called, it **does not feel good, indeed it does not feel like God!** We will normally do anything to keep the old thing from falling apart, yet this is when we **need patience and guidance, and the freedom, with the ever present help of God, to let go instead of tightening our controls and certitudes.** Perhaps Jesus is describing just this phenomenon when he says, "It is a narrow gate and a hard road that leads to life, and only a few find it" (Matthew 7:14). Not accidentally, he mentions this narrow gate and hard road right after teaching the Golden Rule. He knows how much "letting go" it takes to truly love, "to treat others as you would like them to treat you" (Matthew 7:12).

To truly understand Jesus' words, we must **consider their context**. Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem to the cross, to his time of darkness. Thousands were following him. He knew where his road was heading, but they had no idea! He stopped, turned around and asked them, 'do you really know what you're doing?'

Yes, **they were following him because they wanted to change**. The hungry wanted to be fed, the sick wanted to be healed, the poor wanted to be rich, those grieving the dead wanted their loved ones revived. So they followed him enthusiastically, full of hope, but **focusing on nothing beyond improving their own situations./**

Jesus stopped them in their tracks. He asked them, 'are you sure that you're willing to walk my way? I'll be with you but do you know where I'm going? If you counted the cost, are you willing to pay it?'

His followers misunderstood. Yes they wanted to change, but they wanted the change to profit themselves, to bring them more things - a better position in life, to get rich, to be healthy, to gain securities that their world had never been able to offer!

Jesus wanted more, he wanted to experience a transformation, a new beginning, another life, a better life - Eternal life in him.... which would include another dimension of richness, wholeness & security beyond that which the world could ever offer. But to receive this they needed to change in themselves. In their worldly idea of change they were thinking only OF themselves, their families, their lives, their positions. **He was thinking of the kingdom of God - the whole of humankind!** The change that Jesus was thinking about was different than the changes of his followers sought. He was thinking of **an inner personal change**. They were selfishly thinking only of change in their own situations. To follow him, they must change in themselves, be

transformed - **in the whole way that they viewed the world and their place in it.**

Discipleship, we are reminded, **is not periodic voluntary work on one's own terms and at one's own convenience. It involves change not just in one's situation with of one's inner self, one's attitude, one's very meaning.**

Jesus was then asking his followers, 'Are you willing to think in terms of the kingdom of God?' Are you willing to put discipleship first ...to give up your old ways, your own self, those things in your life which distract you from loving selflessly?' / 'Are we willing to choose to the **new beginnings God puts before us, to journey with God in Eternal life now, even if it involves sacrifice?** This is the question Jesus asks us today, in the certainty that He will be with us in his guiding, compassionate Spirit as we work with Him to bring a better life for all!