

Jesus does 'not mince his words'. I used to think the saying was 'mix his words', but no 'mince his words' is evidently the original. To 'mince his words' means to soften them. So to "not mince his words" (the more common expression) means to tell it like it is and not to hold back in order to soften or lessen the impact of your message.

So Jesus was not one to 'mince his words'. He said it as it was.

And as examples of Jesus' directness, several of his messages in the Gospels are described as the 'hard sayings of Jesus': like our sentence for the day (Mtt 10:29) 'Those who lose their life for my sake and for the sake of the gospel will save it'. Now taken on face value, words like this are **hardly likely to build a church congregation are they?**

And 3 more of Jesus' hard sayings are included in today's Gospel from Luke, when he uses what seem to be sharp, tough, even unreasonable words as he responds to those who seek to follow him: One comes to Jesus enthusiastically offering himself: 'I will follow you anywhere', he says. And Jesus answers the volunteer, 'foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head'. In other words, **'If you come with me there will be no home, no security but only life on the move, a life of dislocation & hardship!' It's going to be tough**

In the second encounter the would-be disciple is not a volunteer but a recruit. 'Follow me,' says Jesus. 'First let me go & bury my father', the recruit responds. Now that's reasonable isn't it? - surely obligation to family, the sacred task of burying one's own father can come first. But no, in what appears to be one of the hardest sayings of Jesus', he replies, 'let the dead bury their own dead'. There **seems to be no hint of sympathy or understanding in Jesus' reply.**

The third disciple says, 'I will follow you Lord but let me first say farewell to those at home'. Another plausible, reasonable request. But

again, Jesus' reply is anything but reasonable: 'No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God'. It's as if Jesus is saying, **'There's no time for that - This is urgent - just leave all that & get on with it'**. Tough words again!

Sounds like the firm words of a strict parent of a bygone era: 'You'll do what I tell, when I tell you &.... how I tell you!'

And again, **such words from Jesus, if taken on face value, would hardly inspire new disciples** would they?

But does Jesus really mean that we should disregard our own basic needs, our duties to our parents, & our other responsibilities including to our families, in following him. Surely not, for elsewhere in the gospel, we are commanded to respect our bodies, look up to our parents and care for our families,

So what's going on here? Well Richard Rohr, in his book 'What Do We Do with the Bible?' reminds us that **only if our interpretation of a scripture passage conveys** any or several of the fruits of the Spirit, as they are listed in in our Galatian's reading (Gal 5:22–23)—**love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness, and self-control**—are they as Jesus meant them.

Whereas if any negative or punitive emotions arise from our interpretation— then this is not as Jesus meant them, but **our own worldly interpretation** at work!

So no, of course we're **not intended to take a literal understanding of these 'hard sayings'**. Rather, Jesus is using hyperbole to drive home the point that following him will not be easy and will take commitment.

As Jesus journeyed along the road, some people came up & announced their readiness to follow him. But while all had the greatest of intentions, they had not fully realised the full extent of his demands that his kingdom would make of them .

So Jesus makes this perfectly clear. The images in today's Gospel are not meant to be taken absolutely literally. But they are intended to help us reflect on our **commitment in the face of the various distractions** that will confront us, be they **personal, material, institutional or societal** – which will prevent us from an **unconditional following of Jesus**.

Firstly our **personal doubts & fears** can draw us away from our calling to follow Jesus. Yet Jesus (in Matt 6:34) **advises us against worrying about the future, specifically tomorrow**, stating that each day has enough trouble of its own. We can **have so many fears and anxieties**. We regret or feel nostalgic for so much of the past and worry so much about the future. All of these can have a crippling effect on our lives & therefore how we live them in loving others .

Secondly material temptations to build our wealth & status can lure us away from Jesus' call to us. Yet (in Matt 6:24) Jesus **tells us one cannot serve both God and money. We can have so many desires and attachments in life** like the desire for more money, property, status, success, achievements and the like, that we lose track of God's purpose, that of love, for us

Thirdly **societal norms such as rigid gender role, stigma around mental illness, racism & discrimination, & conformity to harmful behaviours**, are all counter to the God's Word & all of have harmful or detrimental effects on individuals or groups. These negative norms distort Jesus' message as spelt out in Paul's words (in Gal 3,28): **'there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus'**.

And fourthly, **institutional structures** can block our Christian way. In his words (in Mk 12:17)"**render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's"** Jesus warns us against the ways in which politics, bureaucracies or societal norms can impede or even block our Christian mission. And as an example

of a harmful societal norm Paul in today's passage from Galatians points out how some of the Galatian Christians who were converted Jews were being held back by their old Jewish religious custom of slavish literal adherence to their Law .

With aa of these distractions we can spend much **of our time only living half a life, or living other people's lives or indeed adhering so slavishly to society's or the institution's demands, that we are not able to live out our calling in Christ' love. For each of these distractions is counter to the way Jesus called us to go.**

Jesus indeed does not "mince his words".

Our choice is clear from the start: If we want to be Jesus' disciples, we can't simply coast along driven by our own self interest, the norms of our society or the dictates of its institutions. We must choose a different definition of well-being, a different model of success, a new identity with a new set of values.... We are in the words of American theologian & author Brian McLaren to be 'creative nonconformists, difference makers, aliveness activists, catalysts for change'. And biblical images used by Jesus, just as salt that brings out the best flavors in food, we are to bring out the best in our community and society, & also like salt, we are to have a preservative function—opposing corruption and decay.... Simply by being who we are—living boldly and freely in this new identity as salt and light—we are to make a difference,

We'll be tempted, no doubt, to lose our "saltiness" , have our "light" dimmed, be tamed, toned down, shut up, and glossed over by the many distractions before us.

But Jesus calls for us to stand apart from the status quo, to stand up for what matters, and to stand out as part of the solution rather than part of the problem. He means for our lives to confront the blandness

and darkness of evil with the salt and light of good works, pointing through the goodness and kindness of your lives, to our loving God.

And poet, theologian & spiritual leader Drew Jackson reminds that **Jesus established places of radical belonging and a radical love, to facilitate this flavouring & enlightenment of our bland & shadowy world: His church.** His church, where people who are not okay with the status quo of ongoing economic injustice, exploitation, and inequity, but who are freed from the tyranny of power, prestige, and possessions can encourage one another in their faith journey. This is our calling as the church family of St Chad's, a calling in which we can encourage one another in our Sunday gatherings, to touch & colour the lives of those around us through our personal relationships & incidentally, through activities such as 2 mentioned in this week's Chad's Chatter, the pastoral care of those unable to join us in church, & the important outreach to those outside the church, our Firsty Fridays . Please support these outreach initiatives & **help us grow in ourselves & as Christ's Chadian family & indeed as one, draw others to be disciples of Christ.**