

Trinity 12

I stand here in need of God's mercy and grace. May I speak in the name of the God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Would you describe yourself as a Christian? And if so, why, what does it mean to you to belong within the story of the Christian faith?

I like watching stand-up comedy and I watch a wide variety of comedians, aside from a good laugh, these comedians also help me see things from different angles and perspectives. I therefore also enjoy and appreciate comedians, who might have a rather critical or disillusioned view of faith and God.

The other day I came across a video from a comedian I like, who made the point, that if we were to give God a performance review, God's performance ought to be deemed unsatisfactory. He basis his review on his experience of the brutality and suffering in his home-country, Haiti, where gangs have taken over control and disabled government and public services, on the immense suffering and death caused by Covid and the horrors of the genocide in Gaza. These are all recent events within the last five years, not even taking into account historic horrors, and I would agree that it is a fair question to ask, if God simply doesn't care or is too weak to stop all this death and senseless suffering. If it is God's purpose to stop senseless suffering and to ensure a peaceful and just world, then it is entirely fair to say that God's job performance is lousy. Maybe we should consider firing God.

Yet, when we consider our gospel reading today, it becomes abundantly clear that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, does by no means promise us that all shall be well, if only we believe in God and follow Christ. Jesus tells us to consider the cost, if we want to follow him. The cost of being a follower of Christ, a Christian. Nothing about this will make our lives easier or grant us peace and quiet. Jesus gives us stark warnings:

Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.

Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple

And

So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

Jesus uses exaggerations to make a point, which was a typical communication style within his culture. We therefore might want to consider these warnings with a grain of salt, but it is clear Jesus wants to make a very stark point here. Being a follower of Christ is not exactly for the fun or comfort of it all. So why, why would anyone choose to believe and follow a God, whose performance review based on recent events alone, could at best be described as unsatisfactory? Why would anyone want to be a Christian, a follower of Christ, if Jesus himself warns us that to do so comes with a hefty price?

The thing is, we don't own God, God is not our employee, God is not at our service, God is God and we are not. God created the universe out of

nothing and created human beings in the image of God. God didn't have to do so, but did, out of the overflowing love between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God created us, not because God needs us, but because God wanted us and wants a loving relationship with us.

We can love objects, but objects can't love us back. In order for a loving relationship to be possible, both parties need to be able to respond, to choose to love the other. That is only possible if both parties are living beings with the freedom to give and receive love, because love can never be imposed or demanded. Love can only be freely given. This is why God gave us the freedom to choose.

Jesus points to loving God with all we are and have and loving our neighbours as ourselves, as God's two most important commandments. If we all chose to abide by these two seemingly simple commandments, much suffering in this world could be avoided. Yet as recent events and world history shows us, too often we choose prejudice, hatred, selfishness and greed over love, with devastating results.

Choosing love in a world distorted and in pain because of prejudice, hatred, selfishness and greed, is what Jesus Christ did. Jesus showed us a different way of living, one that put love of God and neighbour first. We can see that in the way he healed countless people, in his touching of the untouchable, the sharing of food with outcasts and sinners and his preaching that spoke truth to power, challenged greed and prejudices and spoke hope into a world in pain. The hope that although God's Kingdom starts small like a mustard seed, it grows into a great tree that eventually will bring peace and justice to all of creation. A world where there is no more hunger, where all have a safe home and no one has to be afraid anymore.

Jesus invites us to follow in his footsteps, to be part of God's Kingdom of justice and peace. But he does not deceive us, following in his footsteps of peace and justice will come at a price. Selfishness, greed and prejudice come easy. Building peace and justice in small and great ways is hard work and can come at an incredibly high cost. In Jesus' case, it led him to the abandonment, pain and death of the cross. In a world often dominated by greed, selfishness and hatred, the cost of following the path of peace and justice on which Jesus leads us, can be incredibly high. So Jesus tells us to consider the cost. Are we prepared to follow Christ, even if it might cost us dearly?

Amen.