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Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon : Twelfth Sunday after Trinity
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One of the churches where I worked had a half-finished bell tower next to it. Whenever this reading came around, we all cringed. Harder still are Jesus' words about hating family and giving up possessions. Following him just feels far too costly, far too difficult. And saying that we just need to be prepared to give everything doesn't make it easier. It is only the hardest thing of all, carrying the cross, that makes sense: Jesus carrying the things we have done wrong, our sins and failures, and our being asked to bear the cross, the sign of Christians, in our daily lives. Jesus' words are very down-to-earth and hit home to us very powerfully. He gives the large crowd of people two examples to illustrate the tough cost of being a disciple:

Firstly, if you want to build something, he tells them, you have to plan it all very carefully and make sure you have enough money and resources to finish the project. Otherwise you will be a laughing stock. There are examples galore where groups of people, companies, councils, governments overstretch themselves on big and ambitious projects which are then delivered late and way over budget.

Secondly, Jesus gives the example of a king who plans to go into battle – will he be able to achieve his aim of victory over the enemy? Over the years, Prime Ministers have recalled Parliament on countless occasions so that MP's can discuss together

how best to respond realistically to a world crisis of one sort or another, decisions which always needed to be weighed up very carefully – which I guess is why the new Prime Minister, whoever it is, is really going to have their work cut out this autumn.

In these two examples, Jesus reminds us that it is so easy for all human beings to fall into the trap of living beyond our means. It is so easy to start enthusiastically committing ourselves to something which we don't or can't actually follow through.

But whilst Jesus' words sound very strict and demanding, they badly need to be taken on board. It is essential that no one is under the misapprehension that following Jesus of Nazareth leads to an easy life, with no real cost involved. Part of spreading the good news is making sure that people are aware of the small print. In fact, Jesus probably wouldn't go along with small print but actually have it written in large capital letters so that there is no doubt about what is required in the way of commitment. God wants us to make a well-informed, well-considered decision: becoming a Christian, like undertaking marriage, should never be done lightly or selfishly but reverently and responsibly. Placing God at the very centre of our lives means deliberately placing him at the centre of our thinking and working, our emotions and feelings, our energy and our ambitions.

An idea of what being a Christian really involves is what I always try to get across to those who want to be confirmed. It always seems to me to be important to stress that being a Christian is really quite demanding and that they will have to make the same promises for themselves at their Confirmation which were made for them at their Baptism by their parents and godparents. At a Baptism, parents and godparents promise for themselves and for their children that they will turn away from sin and reject evil – and then turn to Christ as Saviour and trust in him as Lord. So people pledge to come to Christ who is the way, the truth and the life. And it is that last word 'life' that I would suggest is the key.

When it dawns on us the great commitment that being a Christian demands, then we discover that we can with certainty trust God to lead us into the very best life possible. This doesn't mean that we will be magically shielded from sadness and suffering, from hurt and upset – but it does mean that God will carry us through all that and much more. Many of us are well aware of just how much our faith carries us through so much that we have to endure in this life. But what we can go on to discover is that God will never demand of us less than we can, in his strength, give. Never will he push us too fast or overload us too much. That is God giving us life.

When we live God's way, both individually and as a community, we will be greatly blessed. Reflect for a moment upon the life of Mary, the mother of Jesus, whose feast day falls this week. Few mothers will have gone through more sadness, shock and grief in the last months of her Son's life than did Mary. Yet she always trusted in God – “Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord” is her song – and, as we continue to commit ourselves to the life of being a Christian disciple today, it is our song too. And as we continue on our journey, we know we are taking ‘One more step along the world’ asking God that he will be with us as we travel from the old to the new.

So, as we meet together once again at the start of this new academic year, whatever our age, we profess again that we are proud to be part of the family of Christians together at Christ Church and we pray that God will truly bless us in all that lies ahead.