

The Joy and the Cost
of Discipleship.

(Luke 21: 8-19.)

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To-day is the 3rd Sunday of Lent in which we are following Christ on his way to the Cross. In the passage which we have read Christ is predicting the suffering which his disciples and his followers have to face for their allegiance to him. We understand why Christ is preparing them in this manner for the suffering and persecution that they may have to face - but what we do not understand is: Why is it that Christ and his followers are being persecuted? // If we read the story of the life of Christ and of everything that He did: the message that He proclaimed, the miracles that He performed then one becomes even more confused because you discover that everything that He said & did was so beautiful, so good - why then persecute Him and why persecute his followers if they just follow his example? For the main purpose of his life was so marvellous:

1. He came to proclaim the good news (= Gospel) of the Kingdom of God - a Kingdom of love and service and sharing and

mutual support which is so different than the Kingdoms of the world which so quickly become and for are to be Kingdoms of power, of domination, of exploitation, of oppression.

2. He came to heal the sick, to feed the hungry, to give sight to the blind, to give hearing to the deaf, to restore to each person his or her true humanity (women, prostitutes, taxgatherers, foreigners in Israel) and to restore life where death had already claimed its victim.

3. He came to bring a new spirit amongst men, a spirit of joy and fulfillment, of peace, of fellowship and true community - to totally transform and renew all human relationships!

Now isn't it marvellous if somebody wants to make such a contribution to human being! Then why the growing opposition, the attempts to trap him in his utterances and to charge him, to conspire to kill him? // Why? Because of all the good that He has done? No - it is because of other reasons:

1. His claim to be the Messiah, the chosen one of God to bring salvation to mankind - This claim the church leaders (who were in

positions of power as well as in close and intimate collaboration with the state authorities) regarded as blasphemy and therefore felt urged to silence for ever such talk!

2. His presentation of a Kingdom the nature and goal of which was so utterly different from the Kingdoms and governments of His time and the growing fear in the hearts of those earthly rulers that this Man and His Kingdom would eventually threaten and overthrow all their own structures of power and privilege!

3. His totally new set of moral and spiritual values which He was proclaiming which threatened to undermine the hallowed traditions and ~~the~~ religious ^{customs} ~~rituals~~ and rules which these religious leaders had built up so successfully and in such a way that it always worked out to their own advantage and to the detriment of the people. So Jesus is telling them: the new wine that I am producing need new wine-skins - not the old outdated skins that you are trying to patch up!

That is why Jesus realizes that persecution and conviction and crucifixion is awaiting

Him - and that is why He is preparing not only Himself but also His disciples (and through them His followers of all future times) for their bath of suffering that lies ahead of them. He does not mislead them although He would have wanted to protect them from suffering and pain because of His deep love for them. He spells out very clearly what they - and we - as followers of Christ could expect in our obedience and allegiance to Christ: Luke 21: 12, 16, 17. But at the same time He immediately follows this up by words and assurances of encouragement, of comfort, of victory: vs. 13, 14, 15, 18, 19.

Now what are all the contents of this passage saying to us?

1. We as followers of Christ have received and are sharing in the good news of the total renewal of all life through Christ.
2. Christ is preparing Himself for His own persecution and crucifixion
3. Christ is preparing His disciples for their suffering because of their love and loyalty to Him.

4. Christ is providing ^{his followers with} a hidden resource of power and strength and assistance to such oppression and persecution.

To what degree does this apply to Christ's disciples of to-day? Is it also true for them?

1. Do we experience the preaching and teaching of the Gospel here to be good news for us? Do we really desire to hear it? Does it mean so much to us that we do not want to go without it?

(E.g. this sermon - has it brought you new joy or hope or light or courage?) If not then all of us should ask ourselves: what is wrong with either the message, the preacher, the preaching, the teaching, the church council or the congregation?

2. Do we understand why, if this good news is preached faithfully and fearlessly, that we may expect the same kind of reaction from some church and state authorities: persecution of and rejection of the people of God?

3. Do we see it to be worthwhile to become a follower of Christ if this may lead to suffering, betrayal, imprisonment - even death?

4. Do we believe Christ's word in which He promises to sustain and strengthen us in the hours of trial, suffering and persecution?
 "By standing firm you will win true life for yourselves"