

Philemon; Luke 14: 25 – 33

'Family and Jesus'

Introduction ...

If asked: **'How would you describe Jesus?'** ... how would you respond ... where would your answer 'come from'?

As part of any Confirmation Course, I ask the participants to read through a Gospel and think about how Jesus comes across ... so important as Christians understand Jesus to be both our example as a human being and the demonstration through a human life of what God is like.

Well, today's Gospel reading puts paid to anything along the lines of: **'Gentle Jesus, meek and mild!'**

Those words at the end of our Gospel passage – tied with those at the beginning – are Luke's version of the honesty Jesus has in outlining the demands of a Christian disciple:

He doesn't pull his punches ...

He doesn't make false promises ...

And Luke's version is even stronger than the one in Matthew in terms of Family relationships. In Matthew we have:

'whoever loves father or mother or son or daughter more than me ...'

Whereas in Luke we have: **'anyone who comes to me without hating ... father, mother, wife'** etc.

In understanding this language, we have to remember that in the language of the day for Jews 'absolutes' were used rather than our 'less than' or 'more than' in terms of preferences ... for surely Jesus isn't encouraging us to hate ... but we mustn't water it down too much either. As one Bible commentator (Henry Wansborough) writes:

The lesson must be that even the warmest and closest of all

human ties of affection must give way before loyalty to Christ ...

so however strong our family bonds are ... **the bond to Christ must be even more vibrant and strong.**

Philemon and Onesimus ...

The epistle – Philemon – that we heard is a good way to see the principles of the Gospel passage at work.

Cost to Onesimus:

Onesimus is a run-away slave who then meets Paul and becomes a Christian – a follower of Jesus.

We don't know what conversations took place along the way – but we do know 2 things:

The usual punishment for run-away slaves – once caught – was death.

And

St Paul clearly thought he ought to be willing to return ... and put right the wrong of running away.

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So the potential cost to Onesimus of becoming a Christian was his life ... was he prepared to carry on ... having counted this cost ... well, yes.

And still today in other areas of the world – the risk of converting to Christianity is similar.

How about:

The cost to Philemon ...

- the slave owner who is already a Christian.

Not only is Philemon being asked to waive the death penalty ... he's also being asked to have Onesimus back as a 'brother' and not a slave ...

Now if he agrees to that ... picture the likely scene ...

The reaction of the elder brother in the parable of the prodigal son ... might seem like almost nothing.

The run-away slave back – no punishment – rather 'reward' ...

Can you imagine what trouble and tension that might cause ... would be likely to cause in his household:

- with his wife ...
- his children ...
- his other slaves ...

But Paul is in no doubt about the Christ-centred course of action for Philemon to take ... and his bonds in Christ were expected to be more important than any other loyalties.

How might this teaching, this expectation impact on your life and your decision making this week?

Pause ...