

Matthew 10:24-39

PRAYER

Father may these spoken words be faithful to the written word and lead us into the living word, Jesus Christ our Lord - Amen

SERMON

Have you ever bought something, or gone to an event because of some snazzy clever marketing and advertising campaign only to be hugely disappointed with the reality of the situation or item. Visitors who paid up to £35 a ticket for the Willie Wonka experience in Glasgow last year were bitterly disappointed when they arrived at a sparsely-decorated warehouse, where actors tried to make the best of some sad-looking props and a small bouncy castle. Children were offered a half-cup of lemonade and a small ration of jelly beans on their trip to the imaginary sweet factory. Parents were so appalled they called Police Scotland. PR companies have a lot to answer for, I guess they accentuate the positive and play down the negative, but sometimes we need to know exactly what we are signing up to.

Following on from our gospel reading last Sunday In Matthew 10, Jesus continues to set out some very specific directions for his band of followers as they journey through Judea making it clear what they are signing up to. He is part way through these instructions in our gospel reading this morning and it is pretty alarming

Teacher and disciple master and servant stand together for their respective responsibilities. Jesus and his disciples stand together. If they expected to share in His glory, they could also expect to inherit his sufferings. Now, I think if Jesus were alive today, he would be advised to repackage his message to be more attractive. A PR expert would say, "less heavy on the potential suffering angle, Jesus, more on what people can get out of it".

But Jesus is letting them know what they are signing up to and there will be sufferings. But despite the persecution and the trouble which will inevitably come their way when they tell the world of Jesus and proclaim the good news of his kingdom, the disciples are not to be afraid. A human being made in the image of God is more than just a body – they are a combination of both body **and** soul. And the soul lives on with God They are reminded that there is something worse than physical death: the destruction of both soul and body. It's still a bit of a PR nightmare. I wonder how many respectfully declined to join at that point.

But at least they know what we are signing up to and there is a great promise, the Father knows and cares. God pays attention to even the smallest things in life – the death of a sparrow and the number of hairs on our head. How much more he cares for us. Therefore, do not be afraid God has the knowledge power and care to protect disciples from eternal harm

A modern PR man would probably think well this is a bit more positive, we can pull this back. All is not lost; get me Saatchi and Saatchi they can sell anything to anybody

Then Jesus says... without question, to follow Him in discipleship is costly. To follow him as the centre and purpose of our lives may mean losing some personal relationships, even family. ***Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to***

bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn “a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law

This is not the Prince of Peace we all sing about a Christmas. The words are a quote from the Prophet Micah (7.6) who talks about a time of trouble before deliverance by the messiah. When I said I was leaving a high paid local government post for theological college to be a vicar my Christian friends thought it was brilliant, my non-Christian friends thought I was bonkers but if that's what I wanted they would support me and casual friends and work colleagues just thought I was stupid. Even my adoptive dad did his best to talk me out of it.

A total and absolute commitment to Jesus can sometimes be hard, losing friends and family, but that is only half the story for the rewards are immense and eternal. There is a real sense of irony – those who seek life, the glory the money the trappings of success are disappointed and lose life, those who give themselves to the glory of God are the ones who find eternal life, fulfilment and joy.

I think a modern PR company would have walked away by now. You just cannot sell hardship and commitment in the twenty first century, people want easy fixes, a society that likes to pick and mix picking the stuff we like to do and quietly ignoring the stuff that is hard, unpleasant and inconvenient.

No one will, try to kill us, stone us or kidnap our daughters for being Christians in Whitchurch, unlike our brothers and sisters in Egypt Pakistan and Nigeria. The worst that may happen is someone laughs at us in the supermarket, makes fun of us at work, bullies us for declaring our faith and belief in Jesus Christ. We may lose friends even family. It is sometimes easier just to keep silent and never admit we are Christians. When I left local government for ordination training, I was amazed how many Christians came out of the woodwork to wish me luck. People I had known for years and never knew that they believed in Jesus, too afraid of the “office banter” to declare their faith.

PR companies accentuate the positive and conveniently forget the negative, but Jesus is up front and honest. It **will** sometimes be hard following him. If we sign up, we sign up for the whole thing: the glory and the pain, eternal life and earthly abuse. There is no pick and mix in Christianity, however tempting it may be for us to pick the fellowship in church the love and friendship, but respectfully avoid mentioning we are Christian to our secular friends in the pub, or avoid helping strangers in the supermarket.

We who follow Christ wholeheartedly are the ones who find life, fulfilment and joy and eternal life. I pray we have the courage to follow Jesus, whatever the cost, however uncomfortable it may be for his glory this day and every day

AMEN