

Jesus really new how to make a point didn't he!

"If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters".

Wow that's strong language. The older I've got, the more I have come to admire Jesus' masterly ability to make a point with language. Years ago I circled this verse in my bible – and in the margin wrote – poor wording. I was sure that the translators had got this wrong. But no they haven't.

I have come to recognise Jesus the master teacher at work. Of course Jesus doesn't mean us to literally hate our mothers and fathers.

He is using the word hate as an extreme comparison. There are many times we need to take scripture seriously but not literally.

Compared to following him, every other human loyalty has to come in second place, and not a close second. That is Jesus demand of us if we are to be his followers.

He goes on to call us to even be willing to sacrifice our own lives for him and his Kingdom.

That is the symbol of baptism, dying with Christ; this pool is not just a symbol of periodic volunteerism on our own terms and at our own convenience, it is a symbol of being ready to die for Christ (as the commentator Karris so rightly challenges us).

To become a Christian is to die to old loyalties, to die to old aspirations and to die to old self-determinism. And rise to God's plan and direction for our lives.

It is to say that in Christ and His Kingdom we have found something worth more than anything else.

But this is not usual, my father risked his life journeying to Europe and fighting in the WWII for King and country, the citizens of the Soviet Union were expected to risk everything for the state, the fighters of ISIS are expected to risk everything for their leader, and we are caught up in a society that invest everything in the property dream; the only question is who will be first in your Life?

I am pleased to put Jesus first in my life, because he loves me and if he sacrifices my life it will be for something worth dying for. Jesus demands that his followers put his kingdom of light and love first in our lives and leads us in the great battle against the gates of hell in our time.

And that's why I love this symbol of immersion baptism, dying with Christ, rising again in his victory. I love Baptising children to show that they are included with us in God's plan of salvation – but I also love it when young people re-enter the waters of baptism to make the vows for themselves, because faith has a family dimension and a personal dimension.

Jesus invites us into a new family. The church must be more than a club. The church must be the community of those who are committed to a new family of the spirit. We don't talk about it often but every human family is more or less tainted by sin. And Jesus calls us to challenge our human families and transform them. From "Dad you shouldn't talk to mum like that", to spouses "we need to give more sacrificially", to children "we need to follow Jesus where ever he leads us". And alongside this is always the risk that we will be rejected by our human family because of our new loyalty to the family of God. – I know that sounds a little like a cult and believe me I'm not promoting an abusive church, but this is the reality for converts in Muslim and Hindu majority cultures – where baptism can result in being entirely cut off from biological family. Being church is costly for many people, a lot more than giving up an evening to go out and practice community.

A new attitude to life, take up your cross, means being willing to risk your life. Following Jesus might take you to some scary parts of the world. As a doctor it might mean risking your life to develop a new vaccine, or working in Zaire with the victims of Ebola, or nursing people out of a medical ship. As a lawyer it might mean prosecuting a truly dangerous drug lord, or defending a vilified terrorist suspect, the notion of a nation under law with impartial justice comes straight out of the scriptures of the Old and New Testament – we need more Christian lawyers. Or as a teacher it might mean teaching in the back blocks of Otumoetai or Mt Hagen in PNG. As a sanitation worker it might mean dealing with bio-hazards every day and challenging some arrogant people who put food waste in recycling. For every career and job and occupation Jesus has a way of extending his Kingdom through your work.

A new attitude to possessions. You can enjoy possessions as God's great gift to you so long as you hold them lightly, instantly willing to lend a tent, share a car, give away a coat, sell your house or risk the farm for these things do not belong to us, we are only caretakers of creation before the next generation.

Jesus gives us two illustrations that are quite different. In the first he says if you are going to build a tower you need to sit down first and calculate the quantities you would need and the cost of those items before you start buying. See quantity surveying is not just mentioned but commended in the bible. So that you don't start the project and then fail to realise what it was going to cost. Jesus is very upfront about the cost of becoming one of his disciples.

Now King Herod had been building a tower, rebuilding the temple and continuing to expand it, the basics were finished 50 years before Jesus' speech, but apparently it was never finished there was always more to do and in another 40 years it would be destroyed and left a smouldering heap. How many palaces never get finished? Jesus was warning, how many people begin the path of discipleship but never get serious.

The second illustration is even stronger, it's like we are going into a battle, if we are only half hearted about it, we might as well give up now, because the enemy is not half hearted. If you are coming to join the fight we need everything you've got. Are you all in? Because otherwise the smart commander would sue for peace now.

Jesus might have been looking at the zealots who were keen to fight the romans and suggesting that they have under-estimated the enemy. It's interesting in the bible often the prophets suggest retreat. God is a smart and patient commander who knows when to advance and when to retreat. And sometimes in the west it feels like the tide is going out on the church, but let me say this, the tide will turn, and God isn't finished with this church yet.

Jesus uses both illustrations to mean you can't hedge your bets on me. You are either fully in or fully not. What this world does not need is a whole bunch of half-hearted disciples.

If you chose to follow Jesus; You may be in for a clash with your family, you may need to leave your mother or your son's plan for your life behind and pick up Jesus plan for your life.

You may need to risk your very life, he may lead you to battle at the very gates of hell themselves, P-addiction, human trafficking, extortionate finance – we have people from this church on those battle lines.

You may need to invest all you have in God's mission plan for you.

Welcome to the world of Baptism.