

“(Jesus) then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

Did you hear about the family who came from England to live in Australia. They arrived in October. They left in February. Apparently they thought there were too many flies here in Adelaide so they moved on – to New Zealand. Now I don't know about the fly population in New Zealand but I do know they have 40 million sheep that attract flies and only 4m people. That's 10 sheep and the flies they attract per person. We have 20m people and 100m sheep. That's 5 sheep and their flies per person spread out over a lot bigger area. My maths says they will be a whole lot worse off in NZ than they were here in Adelaide! They probably don't mention the flies on the brochure and noone told them what to expect here! Maybe we shouldn't be too hard on them. In all sorts of ways when things don't turn out as we had hoped and expected in life we become disillusioned and we move on and move away. When things get uncomfortable we sometimes want to escape to somewhere better. If honest most days we try and take the most comfortable route through life. That's human nature.

Noone could accuse Jesus of not telling us what to expect if we come on board with him, believe in him and follow him. Jesus said in today's Gospel that he himself came to earth too take the hard way, the way of the cross. **“The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again”**. Peter the disciple wasn't ready to hear that. Had left a job and home and family to follow Jesus and expected it would be worth it, and while Jesus performed miracles it was. So he objects to talk of suffering rejection and death for Jesus. Miracles yes, death on a cross no. He rebukes Jesus. Imagine daring to rebuke Jesus! The words he uses to rebuke Jesus are the same words Jesus used to exorcise demons! You can't blame Peter. We don't want our leaders talking doom and gloom. It's hard to listen to our Prime Minister and Treasurer saying things are going to get a whole lot worse before they get better. We aren't used to that kind of talk from government who usually talk things up and put the best spin on everything! Jesus says “before there is a resurrection there will be a death, my death, and it will mean great suffering for me.”

Peter had the right words. “You are the Christ.” But Peter's idea of a Christ, a messiah and saviour did not include a cross. A crucified Christ is neither attractive nor marketable. But he is the only Christ who can save us. So Jesus says **“Get behind me, Satan!....You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”** The mind of God was that Jesus had to come from heaven to earth to suffer, not just the heat and the flies but to suffer and die for the sins of the whole world. It is what he must do.

I wonder if he ever thought of leaving, of going back home to heaven or somewhere else quieter in the universe? Humanly he probably did, but he didn't leave, in fact he stuck it out to the death, his death on the cross for us. It's what he had to do for our sake.

And then he says to Peter and every would-be disciple of his:

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it."

Jesus says to all of us who put our hopes in him for a better life, healing, and heaven – "It will probably get worse before it gets better for you too, you who believe in me and follow me." It will mean a cross of some kind for you to pick up and carry if you are serious about following me.

What does it mean to you to pick it and carry some kind of cross for Jesus each day? Where do you experience discomfort, frustration, disillusionment, sadness and even pain for being a Christian and following Christ each day? The early Christians discovered following him cost some of them their jobs, friends, and even family. In some cases it cost them their lives. Who of us can say that is our cross for Christ living in Adelaide? In fact on Friday our two local State and federal MPs sat here in the front row at St Pauls and joined us in the World Day of Prayer. Not sure if they held hands as we were supposed to while we sang "Bind us together Lord!" but at least they were here and we didn't feel persecuted by them! The World Day of Prayer reminds us it is easier for us to worship Christ publicly and be a Christian here than in many other countries. Our neighbours in Indonesia and Malaysia don't have it so easy. That's one reason our Lutheran Church in Australia supports them through the Board for Mission.

The cross for each of us and each country may come in different ways, and in Australia it is often "indifferent" ways. Most Aussies don't care and don't bother with us and our faith. We get treated like annoying flies if we try to talk about God in a conversation let alone Christ and his cross. That is frustrating for us, hurtful sometimes and when that indifference is there in our own homes and families it is painful, it is a cross in its own way that we have to bear. The danger is that we become indifferent too, that we give up because it is all too hard to share our faith in indifferent, tolerant, multicultural Australia. We drop the cross because mission is too hard here in a different, "indifferent" way.

I met with the local State School Chaplains last week. Several said they are treated with suspicion. Staff are happy if they do the dogs jobs but wary about anything "Christian". One of them said she is not allowed to use the name and words of Christ in a school newsletter unless she mentions and quotes Buddha or Allah in the same paragraph. Another was asked to help facilitate sessions by Buddhist monks in the school and another to make the decision on whether to allow the Bahais to come into her school for seminars. These Christian chaplains are being put on the spot for Christ and asked to explain themselves and their position. How are they to be respectful of people yet proclaim the uniqueness of Jesus and his death for us in that setting which can be cold and indifferent and sometimes hostile? Say too much and they are out, say nothing or too little and they don't feel faithful. hey need our prayers. How do you witness faithfully to Christ in a multi cultural society? Who knows what the future will confront us with. "Equal Opportunity" Bills will face us with more challenges in the school and public arena.

For an increasing number of pastors and lay people it is becoming too hard to be the church today. Pastors and lay-people are tiring and the work sometimes seems fruitless. There is a cross there for us. For some it is too hard even to be in church! For some when things aren't to liking they up and leave for another church. But there are flies wherever you go, things that make it uncomfortable being a Christian and following Christ together in the world. Jesus says it would mean a cross for him to make things eternally different and better for us, and it will mean a cross it we are serious about giving witness to him and being faithful to him. I wonder what that might mean for us right now?