

Sermon preached by Revd Anne Hoad at St Alban's 30.06.19.

Trinity 2. Luke 9:51-end.

As the gospel says, Jesus sets his face resolutely towards Jerusalem. The path that Jesus himself teaches and models in his life and particularly in his death is a complete outpouring of himself in love. This is the path on which he is to walk. He walks a path of transformation, a path of radical self-abandonment and complete self-giving. He ends up in the tangled political scene of the Jerusalem of his day.

We all have moments in our lives which impact on us and which we never forget. In 1972 I was asked to be an assistant chaplain of the British Team at the Olympic Games in Germany. It was an amazing experience to be part of a global village with virtually every country participating. Each team had small badges representing their country and we all went around swapping them. At the time I was a nun and met up with the Russian Team. Their leader said "What sport are you taking part in?" I said "I'm a shot putter" and we all burst out laughing.

This experience of international participation was brutally undermined when some Palestinians broke into the Israeli Team's headquarters and held them to ransom. Our team leader offered us as mediators but the Germans wanted to do it themselves. That worked out very badly and it ended in a shoot out in which several Israelis were killed. That was an experience I will never forget.

That was the case for some of these men in the Gospel who met up with Jesus. It caused them to think of following him but perhaps they didn't realise it would involve uprooting their lives. They needed to find a simpleness of mind when responding to a call. When we respond to Jesus other things seem suddenly less important.

Jesus meets a man who cries "Lord, I will follow you wherever you go." But Jesus implies that before anyone follows they must count the cost. Jesus is living the itinerant life of a travelling teacher and he says that the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. He lived without boundaries and that left him defenceless against the hard edges of this world.

Another would be follower approaches him. "Let me first go and bury my father." Jesus' reply sounds harsh: "Let the dead bury their dead. You must go and announce the Kingdom of God." The psychologists tell us that every time we have a fine feeling but do not act upon it right away, the less likely are we to act upon it at all. In everything there is a crucial moment and if that moment

is missed, the thing will most likely never be done at all. Jesus urges the man to act at once while his heart is stirred.

Another would be follower says “Lord I will follow you but let me first say goodbye to the folk at home.” Jesus said to him “No man who puts his hand to the plough and looking back is the right kind of person for the Kingdom of God.” No ploughman ever ploughed a straight furrow if he looked back over his shoulder. Sometimes we live in the past, not wanting to leave the things that are familiar to us. We can’t let go.

Jesus did not accept lukewarm or indecisive service. He stated what was necessary and left everyone to make their own decision. He taught a path that would most fully unleash the transformative power of his teaching. Each of us must pass through the eye of the needle to die to self. The people who wanted to follow him needed to undertake a truly essential human task to grow beyond their own survival into self-emptying love. His mission was to show us how to do this.

I was really challenged by this gospel. It seems that the people mentioned as wanting to follow him only react with a partial response. Other things crowd in to distract. I need to learn that singleness of mind that Jesus practised. As we accompany Jesus through the gospels, we are present at one dramatic meeting after another. One person after another experiences the mysterious power in Jesus that from that moment changes the course of his or her life. He calls out this change in our own lives. His is a quiet harmonising love in the depths of our hearts which infiltrates even the deepest places of darkness and blackness.

In the words of Deuteronomy:”What then Israel does your God ask of you? Only this, to fear the Lord your God, to conform to all his ways, to love him and serve him with all your heart and soul.”