

READINGS

Year C

<i>Principal Service</i>	Genesis 15.1-12,17-18 Psalm 27 Philippians 3.17 - 4.1 Luke 13.31-35
<i>Second Service</i>	Psalm 135 Jeremiah 22.1-9,13-17 Luke 14.27-33
<i>Third Service</i>	Psalm 119.161-176 Genesis 17.1-7,15,16 Romans 11.13-24

COLLECT

Almighty God,
you show to those who are in error the light of your truth,
that they may return to the way of righteousness:
grant to all those who are admitted
into the fellowship of Christ's religion,
that they may reject those things
that are contrary to their profession,
and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same;
through our Lord Jesus Christ,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

(or)

Almighty God,
by the prayer and discipline of Lent
may we enter into the mystery of Christ's sufferings,
and by following in his Way
come to share in his glory;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

POST COMMUNION

Almighty God,
you see that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves:
keep us both outwardly in our bodies,
and inwardly in our souls;
that we may be defended from all adversities
which may happen to the body,
and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

HYMN SUGGESTION

Fill thou my life O Lord my God – Horatius Bonar

Fill Thou my life, O Lord my God,
In every part with praise,
That my whole being may proclaim
Thy being and Thy ways.

Not for the lip of praise alone,
Nor e'en the praising heart,
I ask, but for a life made up
Of praise in every part:

Praise in the common things of life,
Its goings out and in;
Praise in each duty and each deed,
However small and mean.

Fill every part of me with praise;
Let all my being speak
Of Thee and of Thy love, O Lord,
Poor though I be and weak.

So shall no part of day or night
From sacredness be free,
But all my life, in every step,
Be fellowship with Thee.

Hymns Ancient and Modern New Standard no. 200

SERMON STARTER

*Dr Jon Curtis - Lay
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The history of the world is full of former occupations. Now that humanity has reached the twenty-first century in all its automated glory, we can wonder in amazement at the jobs that some of our ancestors and forebears fulfilled. Whether it's the children that were sent climbing into the darkness above the fireplace to sweep the chimneys of grand houses, or the armies of agricultural workers that would descend into the fields at harvest time, we now live with a completely different relationship to the work that needs fulfilling, and the ways in which it is done. When we read both the story of the disciples catching more fish than their nets could manage in Luke 5, or Jesus talking about the building of towers to teach about the cost of discipleship in Luke 14:27-33, we can be forgiven for thinking that these are words and stories for a different era with little relevance to us today.

Luke 14:33 records Jesus saying this; 'any of you who does not give up everything cannot be my disciple'. Surely this attitude belongs in the past too, and God wouldn't expect us to respond in this way now? Are we really being asked to give up everything we have by a God who loves us? Is that the behaviour of a gracious and loving Heavenly parent?

SERMON STARTER

And yet, here it is in black and white – paying the full costs of discipleship is a very real requirement. This was not an easy path for those first disciples of Jesus, and it is not an easy path for us now. But Jesus is eminently fair throughout the gospels when it comes to the standards he asks for: these expectations are clearly explained. If the desire to build a tower overtakes us, and we set to work without fully understanding what will be required, we're likely to fall short of the high standards (no pun intended). Jesus is correct to say that an unfinished tower is no good to anyone. In his words, 'this person was unable to finish'. Our landscape is littered with ambitious architectural projects, and the failings are there for us all to see.

The question for us then is this – if we're stepping out and following Jesus' call to follow him, are we prepared to commit to this choice? When Simon Peter, James and John went fishing, and Jesus accompanied them to give direction, we were shown how significantly our tasks and lives can be changed by Jesus' involvement. In Luke's words 'they were all astonished at the catch of fish they had taken'.

To misquote President Franklin Roosevelt – when it comes to Jesus, the only thing to expect is the unexpected. In other words, all that we can fully know is that much will be required, in ways that we don't yet appreciate or understand. But to begin the journey means that we will be asked for much indeed, particularly in terms of faith – trusting God to be with us, no matter how hard the journey might be.

When Jesus tells Simon Peter to let down his fishing nets again, we can sense the doubt in Simon's reply. He doesn't expect the new command to make any difference to their haul of fish – he might well see Jesus as another armchair fisherman, with all the good ideas but none of the experience. And yet, he does as Jesus says, and his whole life changes.

We can be similarly inclined to think that we know best. And yet both of these stories tell us that we have to give space to the words and life of Jesus. Simon Peter knows as much, even though Jesus' kingship is nowhere near yet fully revealed. He's taken him out on the boat and started to engage with him, so when he speaks with authority, the fisherman decides to listen. The results are startling.

SERMON STARTER

This can hopefully lead us to a clarity about the unfinished tower – a structure with no purpose is a waste. A waste of the energy to plan and build, and a waste of resources. In this era of knowledge about the reduction of waste, we are well aware of the need to be careful with what we have – an unfinished construction project is much more wasteful than one that has never been started. The analogy is clear – if we are bothering to engage at all with the idea of ourselves as disciples, we need to commit to it. The old saying ‘in for a penny, in for a pound’ gets to the crux of the matter, and asks the question – ‘what does it really look like to commit?’ This was a question that Simon Peter asked himself throughout his life. Despite many well-recorded bumps in the road, he was a man who committed fully, all the way through until his death. Because of this commitment, he knew life in all its fullness.

This isn't a story for the past, or a tale about a bygone era – this is the choice that we still face today. What does it mean to commit, and how do we enter into this commitment wholeheartedly? Those questions are ones for you today, and you will all have different answers, but the ultimate truth is this – the commitment pays back in so many ways that we can't even imagine; for you, for your community and for the world. We might feel as if we can't give up anything else, but the truth is that we're set to gain everything. Thanks be to God.