

Hospitality to the Lost

Luke 14:25-35

How well would Jesus do if he stood as a candidate in yesterday's federal election? How would Jesus' viewpoints and convictions fare in today's political climate? This was the premise of an article I came across this week, written by Jarrod McKenna, pastor of Westcity Church in Perth. He makes two points:



No one would vote for Jesus. He was a refugee, having to flee from Palestine to Egypt when Herod went on the warpath. Not only that, but he was also middle-eastern, and involved in civil disobedience, as well as being poor and homeless, with no place to lay his head.

His election platform would be dismissed as unrealistic: "Love your enemies ... love your neighbour as yourself ... do not violently resist an evil person ... Whatever you did to the least of these my brothers and sisters, you

did to me."

Perhaps like me, you're starting to get uncomfortable as you begin to work through the political implications of what Jesus did and said. What kind of defence policy can be built on the premise of non-violence? And how do Jesus' words provide a solution to the vexed question of immigration policy? Can we legislate for open hearts and open borders? Where's the wisdom in speaking against the self-interest that motivates the electorate?

Perhaps we need to ask ourselves a deeper question, "Would we have voted for Jesus?" It's easy for the church to sit in judgement on the world around us for not following Jesus or supporting his message, but it's not the world that has been called to live the Jesus' Way. It's the church.

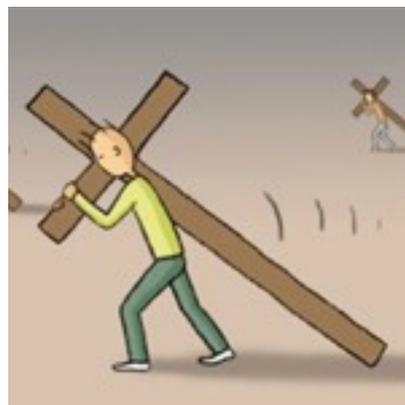
McKenna makes this searing point: "What's strangely forgotten around election time is the important detail that faith leaders and politicians worked together to organise the killing of Jesus." The Sanhedrin, the scribes and the teachers of the law worked hand in glove, with a little help from

one of Jesus' disciples, to consign Jesus to a cross. How does the church today live Jesus' politics of grace? How do we put his policies of love into practice?

Today Jesus is speaking to a whole crowd of people who have been following him, intrigued by his words, wondering whether he might be the one to kick out their Roman occupiers and deliver their preferred future. But today Jesus issues the challenge to them: Do you really understand what it means to follow me? It's a hard call and a difficult road. And it will challenge every decision you make, and make you go against the flow of the culture in which you live.

The heart of Jesus' message revolves around the cross.

"Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." We've heard these words often enough that perhaps they have lost their value to shock. But you can bet that the first people who heard what Jesus said were stunned, and they didn't even know that the journey that Jesus was on would end with a cross. They would also be astonished to discover that the instrument that brutalised Jesus, and many other criminals has become a 'must-have' fashion accessory today.



We wear the cross, and there's nothing wrong with that, but we are also called to carry it. Carrying the cross means making some hard choices. Starting with those nearest and dearest: "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple."

Politicians often campaign on family values. How many times have you heard the phrase

"working families" over the course of the election campaign? Jesus calls for a radical reassessment of even the place of our families. Even if we understand the word 'hate' to mean 'to turn away from, or to detach oneself from', we are still left with a stark decision. Does our primary loyalty lie with God in Christ? Family is not the highest good, nor life itself, but God alone.



Jesus also connects this cross-carrying with our constant preoccupation with things. There is the call to give up, or literally, to let go of our possessions. Possessions seek to own the ones who think that they own them. Hear the excuses trotted out in the previous parable of the Great Banquet: 'I have brought a piece of land, and I must go and see it...I have brought five yoke of oxen and I am going to try them out...' Things take on a life of their own. Soon they drain us of life in God. Even relationships can do that: "I have just been married and therefore I cannot come."

Sadly we know these excuses all too well. The Christian author Ronald Sider chastises the church for reflecting the fakeness and emptiness of contemporary culture. He writes: "Scandalous behaviour is rapidly destroying [American] Christianity. By their daily activity, most 'Christians' regularly commit treason. With their mouths they claim Jesus is Lord, but with their actions they demonstrate allegiance to money, sex and self-

fulfilment...We proudly trumpet our orthodox doctrine of Christ as true God and true man and then disobey his teaching.”

“Salt is good,” Jesus says, “but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored?” How are we going to season society and live in ways that show hospitality to those lost to God if our lives are not different?

So what do we do when Jesus’ words skewer us? What hope is there for any of us? We have to go back to the beginning, to Jesus’ cross. It’s the only way. Jesus was prepared to follow where his Father called him. He walked where no one else could go. Jesus was strung up on the cross. He carried it as only he alone could do. His cross is enough for us. We can only be disciples through the costly grace of the cross. Now that we know about the cross, now that we have been gifted with a living relationship with the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, now we are ready to walk the road less travelled.



It is still a hard road. It still calls for a huge commitment, for a turn-around in our lifestyles. Carrying the cross means that we value our relationship with God above all others, above things, above family, above self. It asks of us that we don’t go back to trusting what we have, rather, who we have, indeed who has us. It also means that we are called to make decisions, every day, every hour, which factor in the cross. It might mean giving up habits and actions that we know in our heart are contrary to God’s will for us. It might mean suffering the ridicule of friends, neighbours and workmates for taking a stand about a matter of faith, an injustice, an ethical issue. There is certainly pain for some in choosing the way of the cross above the way of family.

Living this way, Jesus’ way, is compelling and strangely attractive to a world that is looking for people who believe what is life giving, and live what they believe. Jarrod McKenna says this of the early Christians: “They didn’t form a lobby group [against things they didn’t like] They just rolled up their sleeves and got busy living God’s love in the power of the Spirit, especially amongst the poor. ... Regardless of the results come Sunday, I’m still going to live the politics of God’s love, especially for ‘the least of these’”





It's God's heart that all people know of his all-embracing love. He wants everyone to come to his kingdom celebration feast. God wants his good news of love through Jesus to be unleashed on the world through the words and actions of Jesus' disciples. In the parable of the Great Banquet, Jesus orders his servants to "go out to the roads and country lanes and compel [people] to come in, so that my house may be full." God doesn't want anyone to be lost to him. The witness of our lives makes for compelling reading of the good news in the world. So

go and show hospitality to the lost by being God's messengers, his salty people who add the flavour of Christ to your home, workplace and community. Amen.