

Let me be a comfort for you, Lord

Let me ask you this... if you needed to lay your head on something to sleep at night, would you choose a pillow or a rock? If you wanted a good night's sleep, would you choose a bed or the street? If you had to walk for five kilometres, would you choose to wear a pair of thongs or some proper shoes?

One of the things that is near the top of your mind in each of these situations is your comfort. How many of us think that comfort is not only a good thing but an important thing? We are constantly bombarded with messages from all around us emphasising comfort. We even have comfortable exercise machines! We are told we need a comfortable retirement plan. It's good to have comfortable leather seats in our car when we are driving. There is nothing wrong with physical comfort.

The problem with comfort is that we allow it to creep over into our spiritual life. We want to have a comfortable religion. A religion that allows us the security of belief in a loving God, but makes no real demands upon us.

Comfort always costs. Many times we refuse to acknowledge the price we pay to keep it. Even more important, it clashes with Jesus' statement in Luke 9:23 where he says, *"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."* So what do comfort-craving people do with something like the cross? Very easy... we make it a symbol and keep it at that level. We put crosses on our buildings. We put them in our churches. We put them on t-shirts, we put them on necklaces and earrings. We hang them in our cars. We do just about everything except pick them up to follow Jesus.

Over the last few months our teaching has been focused upon a man who willingly allowed himself to be tortured to death on a cross for our sake. We talk about the life that Jesus gives to us, and Jesus does give us new life. He does give us the promise of eternal life. But the price of all of that is a willingness to die to ourselves in order to follow Christ. Every day, we have to make a decision to follow Christ. If we're not, we are not listening to the Holy Spirit in our lives.

In today's gospel reading, Jesus is about to make a turn in his ministry. He has done things all over the country. He's been on the sea, in the mountains, on the plains and in the wilderness... doing all kinds of miracles, preaching great sermons, and gaining the favour of the people. People were following Jesus like some people follow rock stars. It was cool to be seen with Jesus.

But now Jesus is on his final march to Jerusalem. He knows that when he gets there, he will be arrested, he will be beaten, he will be rejected, he will be alone, and he will be crucified. But the people don't know this. It was still cool to be seen with Jesus. But perhaps the societal change was already evident.

Jesus sent some people into a Samaritan village, to make preparations for him. Most Jews would not even go through Samaria much less try to spend the night there and eat. When the Samaritans realised it was a group of Jews, who they hated, trying to make preparations in their city, they told them to get lost. James and John felt so insulted by this, they wanted to destroy the whole city by calling for fire to come down and burn them out. They were not picking up their cross.

Jesus rebuked them for their attitude and simply headed for another town. As Jesus is walking along, a man comes up to him and says to Jesus, *"I will follow you wherever you go."* This man has no idea what is to come. All he sees is how cool it must be to follow Jesus. He doesn't know that two of the top guys have had their feeling hurt by being shown the devil was at work inside of them. He didn't see the envy and jealousy among the disciples, who had recently been confronted by Jesus for arguing about which of them was the greatest. Even though they had been with Jesus for three years, they still did not understand how much of a change Jesus wanted to work inside their lives. How many of us are still where the disciples were, in need of a spiritual makeover?

Jesus is trying to make people aware of the consequences of truly following him when he says, *"Foxes have dens and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head."* Jesus is saying that picking up your cross does not guarantee a comfortable place to spend your life.

Is God against our comfort? No God isn't.

But is our comfort working against what God wants to do in our lives?

Let us pray:

How I thank you for Jesus and for all that you have done for me!

I praise and thank you for your Word.

I praise and thank you for your Spirit –

such an incredible gift you have given to me because I am your child.

I want to give you all of myself.

I hold nothing back.

As much as I know how, I want to give you everything I am and all that I have.

You have given your all for me – even though it cost you everything.

Now I give my all for you – even though it costs me everything.

Amen.

REFERENCES

sermoncentral.com/sermons/the-comfortable-cross-we-don-t-want-the-real-thing-rick-gillespie-mobley-sermon-on-comfort-zone-228410

Prayer is by April Cassidy; an extract from peacefulwife.com/2014/12/24/giving-all-of-myself-to-christ-a-prayer