

Second Sunday of Lent 2016 Evensong

Luke 14: 27 – 33

Adriane and I got our first dog when Adriane was pregnant with our first child. We knew that we wanted a family dog. But we reckoned that, if we had the child first, we'd be overwhelmed with rookie parenthood and would never feel able to cope with a dog as well; whereas if the dog was a fait accompli, the child would fit in somewhere along the line.

So Adriane went along to the RSPCA in Halifax in the days when, unlike now, you could just wander along the kennels until you saw a dog that melted your heart. And with the sort of sixth sense for dogs that Adriane undoubtedly has, she just knew when she had found the dog for us. And it proved to be the most wonderful part of the family for over 14 years. It was a funny thing: I think it had been a farm yard accident, a sort of cross between a border collie and some sort of terrier. But the point was that she was in the RSPCA

because she'd been found at the side of the road, obviously having been hit by a car. And she had a broken leg. And when Adriane first saw her she was in a plaster cast all the way up.

The strange thing was that it was as if the RSPCA were doing their level best to dissuade us from adopting her. They kept asking whether we were really sure we were prepared to take her on; and pointing out that there could be all sorts of expensive complications later on with arthritis and what not because of this broken leg.

Well it seems to me that the RSPCA would have fitted in very well with the scheme of St. Luke's Gospel. Because in today's New Testament lesson Jesus is repeatedly asking the crowds "Are you really sure you want to?" "Have you really taken on board all this might involve?" "Have you really thought this through?"

The Revd Matthew Pollard, Rector of Bridlington Priory

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, determined to face down the cataclysmic conflict that will end his earthly ministry. He's spent three years in and around Galilee, preaching and healing and declaring that the Kingdom of God is at hand. But now his *modus operandi* has all changed. He's set his face on Jerusalem and nothing will stop him walking headlong into the conflict that will cost him his life.

And when you're reading Luke's gospel you've got to be careful to make sure you know who Jesus is talking to; because the audience changes. Sometimes he's giving private tutorials to his disciples; sometimes he's gathering groups of followers around him; and at others whole crowds are pressing in on him.

When Jesus sets out for Jerusalem, even though he keeps warning them that there's trouble ahead; no good will come out of it; he's facing at least as bad a deal as all the other prophets who had gone before him; even so the crowds keep coming to him. He's not

encouraging them. He's not trying to raise a multitude at the head of which to march into Jerusalem. In fact he tries to put them off. Because you need to be sure, once you've started something, that you're going to be able to finish it.

And that applies no matter who you are. Rich and poor alike. Whether you're a peasant, eking out a living trying to grow a few vines and you need to build a tower to see thieves or scavenging animals; or whether you're a statesmen trying to muster the resources to reconfigure international real-politic; no matter who you are, you need to know what you're getting into. (I'm not sure whether anybody told David Cameron that, or not!)

Jesus doesn't put any sugar coating on Christian discipleship to make it look any more attractive than it really is. Christian discipleship is costly. It's not for the faint hearted. And we need to have thought through whether we are really prepared to accept the

life-changing and life-shaping implications of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

But, at this point we need just to be careful before we drown in a sea of hyperbole. The demands of discipleship are absolute. It requires total commitment. Quite right. But it doesn't require us to renounce everything else in favour of being a religious nutter. We can read the Bible and think it says that because Semitic turns of phrase get lost in translation. It does say you've got to renounce everything, but it doesn't mean what we mean by that.

Christian discipleship doesn't require us to abandon our commitments, but to reconfigure them in the light of our discipleship. Our discipleship permeates everything we are and everything we do. So, however you earn your living, whatever political convictions you've got, whatever family commitments you've got, if you're a Christian, they don't remain unaffected with a bit of religious observance bolted on as an optional

extra. They become reconfigured in the light of faith. If you earn a living by being an *x* then you don't just become an *x* who does religious stuff in their spare time: you become a Christian *x*. If you are one of those army of people whose every waking hour is determined by the child-care commitments of being hands-on grandparent, you don't just become a grandparent who happens also to go to church: you become a Christian grandparent. If you are somebody of rigorous political persuasion, how you exercise your political judgements will become theologically informed so you're not just an old bore, but a Christian old bore.

But are we really up for it? Are we prepared to determine every question we encounter, from how and where we earn our living down to what sort of instant coffee we drink, by the principles of Christian discipleship?

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As we journey into Lent and the magnetism of Jesus draws us hurtling towards Gethsemane with him, these are the questions to which he asks us to give weighty consideration.

Amen.