

MATTHEW 16:21-28

In today's reading Jesus prepares his disciples for a new stage in his, and therefore their, life. It's not going to be anything they wish for but it's coming nevertheless. Jesus makes sure they speak about it before it happens to prepare them for what lies ahead.

The Greek word Kairos, meaning the right or critical moment, has been used to explain need for a big change. It was used in 1985 to speak of South African apartheid and then in 2009 in a document that came from Palestine, bearing the very name Kairos. Both marked a time when change was desperately needed and therefore help from the world was sought. Kairos has come.

Many believe that such a time for dramatic change has come in terms of climate change. The next 10 or 15 years will tell whether we managed to keep global heating to 2 degrees C increase and therefore to avoid a major catastrophe on a global scale. Paris agreement is a step in the right direction even though the United States of America have decided to withdraw. We need to work together. The time is now. Things must change. It's high time we set ourselves goals and started travelling in that direction together.

We know that there is a cost involved. We know that we need to deny ourselves some things to stop the world sliding into an abyss of catastrophic and irreversible changes.

Others before us knew it too. Jesus knew it but he firmly believed the joy of his faithfulness would seriously outweigh the cost. His disciples and early followers knew they were to be stabbed, persecuted, killed – and yet the joy of following the Way brought them more joy and satisfaction. They carefully weighed their options and chose what they perceived to be a better way.

Greg Carey, Professor of New Testament at Lancaster Theological Seminary wrote in his article entitled 'Jesus has no part-time disciples': 'In 1961 a group of Nashville students resolved to reinforce the Freedom Rides. Two previous busloads of Freedom Riders had already encountered firebombing and severe beatings, and the Nashville students determined that the movement, having commenced, should not be allowed to fail.'

No one could deny that these students experienced joy during their trials — the notorious Bull Connor complained, "I just couldn't stand their singing" — but these students were fully mindful for the potential cost as well. The night before their departure, they had signed their last will and testaments. Singing hymns after signing one's will: the cost and joy of discipleship.¹

Today we're celebrating our Harvest Thanksgiving service. We give thanks to God for the harvest of orchard and field, for beef and lamb, for salmon and haddock, for coffee and chocolate. As we do that, we recognise once again that God made us stewards of this earth and we are accountable to him for what's happening with it. Worldwide we've not

¹ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/greg-carey/matthew-16-on-scripture_b_934374.html.

done a great job so far and more needs to be done urgently to preserve what's left. The potential gain is great but our loss as we strive towards it will be great too.

Word-Sunday.com offers the following challenge that I'd like to finish with: 'We have so many material possessions to acquire and maintain, yet so much to give up in the name of Christ. How can we walk the road of loss, when our desires want more and more? How can we live for Christ when we are tempted only to live for today? This is the challenge Jesus gave us in Matthew.

Make a short list of your important possessions, relationships, and powers. Offer that list to the Lord. Pray for guidance and prudence. And pray for faith when those things and people are taken from you.'² Amen.

² <http://www.word-sunday.com/Files/a/22-a/A-22-a.html>.