

## Reflection for 21<sup>st</sup> June (Trinity 3)

The popular assumption is that religion is meant to be a comfort to people. Believers are supposed to receive help in times of trouble, and a peace in their lives that is unknown to non-believers. We can be thankful to God that there is truth in that assertion, and many Christians can gladly testify to the strength and comfort that their faith has given them, in good times and in bad. Yes, there is truth here – but it is not the whole truth. Our readings today suggest that faith can sometimes lead to things other than peace and comfort.

Today's Gospel passage, in particular, makes difficult reading. Here Jesus spells out to his disciples that to share his mission is to share something of the hostility and rejection that he experienced. Sharing his mission in their situation could even mean seeing families divided – just one of the costly consequences of doing God's will. The way of the Christian is the way of the cross, with all its shame and humiliation. It sometimes means identifying with those who stand against the powers of the day in the name of God, and doing so for the sake of those who are victims of inequality, injustice and oppression.

Jesus does not hide the truth of the cost of discipleship from his disciples: what he is spelling out here are the consequences for families when someone decides to leave the synagogue and join the church.

And yet there is comfort here: there is comfort in the strength and grace of God. Three times in this passage Jesus tells his followers not to be afraid. In fact, the commandment which appears most frequently in the Gospels is precisely that: "Do not be afraid!". The context of all this struggle and hardship, this costly loyalty to God in a confused and dangerous world, is the promise of the ultimate triumph of God.

This is not the easy and glib triumphalism which sometimes masquerades in the name of Christianity, but a costly triumph, born of the love and grace of God. It is a sharing in the resurrection of Christ, because the gospel involves dying in order to live. It is about the God who did not abandon his Son even though on the cross he appeared to do so. It is the good news of the God whose last and final word is one of love, forgiveness and grace.

Do not be afraid!

*Bob Whittle*