

TRINITY+17

‘You lack one thing’ said Jesus, ‘go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor’.

Jesus seldom, if ever, commanded his followers to meditate - to contemplate - to read - or to study. There is no record of him ever giving his disciples instruction on the spiritual life - in fact his disciples asked him on one occasion - reported in Luke 11 - to teach them how to pray as John the Baptist taught his disciples. Apart from this occasion when Jesus taught them the Lord's prayer, there is no other evidence of Jesus giving any spiritual direction. Unlike the great spiritual leaders in Buddhism and Hinduism, Jesus does not take on the role of a Guru. The teaching of Jesus is very action oriented. "Feed my lambs," he said to Peter, "Heal the sick," he instructed his disciples, "go out into the world," and so on. Hence his response to the rich man. "You want to enter into eternal life? - sell your possessions and give to the poor." When the young man heard this, he went away with a heavy heart - for he was a man of great wealth. That was the one thing he was not prepared to give up. How often that happens doesn't it - we dare not ask the question - "What must I do in order to gain eternal life" - because we know what the answer will be - and we - like the rich man are not yet ready to make that kind of sacrifice. But in the end it is our deeds which matter, not our holy thoughts, however exalted they may be. As St. John puts it - the only valid and effective love is that which operates in good deeds rather than in word and intention. It has been said that the pathway to hell is paved with good intentions.

Of course there is nothing wrong with study and meditation on the word of God, so long as the meditation gives rise to action. Jesus was quite clear about this. It is by our actions that we feed the hungry and give sight to the blind. It is by the fruits of our spiritual lives that we will be known as Christians. God's way, the truly

spiritual way, the way of following Jesus, is seen in the things we do rather than in the things we say. "It is not the person who says "Lord, Lord" but the person who does the will of the Father in Heaven, who enters into life eternal.

It is not only people in general but Christians themselves who describe someone as a ‘church-goer’; as if Jesus went through the whole process of incarnation, teaching, death and resurrection in order to turn people into ‘church-goers’. Surely following Jesus is more than just a Sunday hobby or the support of a good cause. All baptised Christians should be challenged to be something more than to be ‘church-goers’ and to commit our lives to showing that we are disciples by the way in which we live. Jesus challenged the rich man to sell his possessions and give the money to the poor. The man was shocked and went away grieving. We are being challenged in our generation not to be ‘church-goers’ but ‘to be the church’. When asked ‘Do you go to church?’ our reply should be ‘We are the church – the body of Christ’.

Another phrase that people in general and Christians themselves use is that a person has ‘gone into the Church’. What they really mean is that the person has been ordained. It is as if the only people who have to be committed to actually doing something about the proclamation of the gospel are the clergy. How have we arrived at a situation that we think that there is a group of people called the ‘laity’ from whom all that God requires is that they attend the services and raise funds for the church!

The hymn expresses the idea of discipleship - "Fill thou my life O Lord my God, in every part with praise, that my whole being may proclaim thy being and thy ways. So shall no part of day or night unblest or common be; but all my life, in every step, be fellowship with thee."

AMEN

