



## GOSPEL GOSSIP

Jesus said, 'If any want to become my followers...'

St Matthew 16. 16-28

Sunday 3 September

Before any of us joins a club or signs up for something, it is a sensible thing to do to read the small print. That way, it can be seen what the catch (if any) is, and we can weigh up more confidently whether it is a good idea. Many snags are hidden in the small print, and may fall into the trap, beguiled by the attraction of the offer – and that's the intent.

Jesus is offering us the kingdom. It's not for sale, it's not exclusive; it's for anyone. In his ministry of teaching, healing and miracle-working, he gives more than idea of what the 'kingdom' is. Not just a reward for a good life lived in accordance with God's will, but also a better, a full, life in this world for all people. But there is no 'small print', no catch in his offer to trick the unwary, the gullible or the desperate. He makes it clear that if anyone wishes to follow him, then they must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow him. This is just after he has shocked his disciples by revealing what fate awaits him in Jerusalem.

- What do you think the kingdom (of God) is?
- Where is it, can it be seen now?
- Is it only available to the chosen few?
- How can it be entered?
- Are there any benefits of it?

The qualifying statement, the 'terms and conditions' are quite salutary to those who listen. For many the kingdom is achieved by a quid pro quo: I'll be nice to you and I expect you to be nice to me. But is that how it is regarding the kingdom of God?

The statement that Jesus makes is just that, a statement of fact. It is not a bribe, it is not a threat, it is not an ultimatum. Just a statement of fact. Having said that, it is a statement that makes us all stop in our tracks and consider. Not just a quick weigh up of whether or not, and then yes or no, but something which has to be considered its implications against a life-changing decision.

- What would be the 'cross' of which you're most anxious?
- Does that put you off following Jesus?
- Is it possible to 'largely' follow Jesus any more than you be 'slightly' pregnant?
- How does one 'follow' Jesus?
- Are you prepared to 'deny yourself' – and what does that involve?

The cost of the kingdom is high. Jesus has outlined what it will mean to him – that he will suffer in Jerusalem and die. And as co-heirs to the kingdom, it will be costly for all who follow him, because following him means not just to Jerusalem but to the cross, death, and beyond. The \$64,000 question is, how much do we value the kingdom?