



**February 5**

## ***THE NEW SHOFAR***

**Jesus: *There are two roads, one is wide and easy to follow, the other is narrow, winding and tough. Not much has changed but the choice remains ours.***

***I am a true Woke to the core – awake to Christ in the world***

If we were to listen to the voices of the new social movements in the world around us, we would hear them celebrating because we stand in that moment in human history when the peoples of the earth are liberated from the “yoke of absolute power”. What we see and hear in the cacophony of street violence and protesting are nothing other than the birth-pangs of a new world order. But this is a thoroughly humanist vision in which God has no place, and absolute truths are anathema. These movements need to be challenged for the world’s sake. But...

***Give us a king so that we can be like the other nations...***

***Being a Christian is difficult because*** we must now confront *our lives* from a worldview that goes against that of that promoted by the world. It comes with a new set of values—God’s values, values revealed to us in the scriptures and most clearly and fully in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. Knowing Christ means our eyes are opened to The Truth and we can perceive the falsehoods of the world. Fighting against those lies can be difficult – try challenging cancel culture, Black Lives Matter philosophies, the sexual agendas, the standard set with 72 genders, the death of absolute truths, Australia being a racist nation, God is dead and dangerous, etc.

***Being a Christian is difficult because*** it requires growth. God loves us too much to let us stay the same. Growth, however, can be painful at times, and we usually don’t like to leave our comfort zone (especially liturgical and traditional areas) and we forget how positive change in the Holy Spirit led Church community is rewarding. As we grow in Christ, we realize that God is not just desirous of our conforming to a set of rules. He wants every part of our lives. He wants a crucified life, given totally over to Him. We learn through obedience and trust to find rest in His guidance.

***Being a Christian is difficult because*** we must constantly say “no” to our own fleshly desires and yield to the Spirit. Humility and service must be our watchwords and washing feet our way of living. We learn to handle conflict with grace, instead of through retaliation. We learn to forgive, rather than hold grudges. We learn to replace the lukewarm emotions we once called love with true, unconditional love. We grow through the opportunity to die to ourselves daily, to become obedient.

***Yes, being a Christian is difficult in many ways.*** But that’s only half the story. The difficulties we face as believers today face are not tackled alone. Every challenge is met through the power of Christ who lives within us (**Philippians 4:13**). The faithful follower of Christ will never be completely overwhelmed (**2 Corinthians 4:8–9**). There are definite, eternal rewards for following Christ (**Luke 18:29–30**). We learn by experience that God’s ways are better, safer, and more reliable than the world’s ways, His Truths more enduring and productive of love, joy and peace. Our trusting obedience to God becomes the pathway to a transformed and abundant life (**John 10:10**).

Christians do not hate the world but strive to live in the world as Christ’s “salt”. We are Christ-bearers, men and women whose human existence was taken up and transformed by the incarnation. God-bearers who illuminate the image and likeness of God through our every word and deed. We love the world as God loved the world: ready to die that others may live. Simply put, it is not easy being a disciple of Jesus Christ.

## **What is a salty disciple? What makes a light beaming follower of Jesus?**

- A disciple must love Jesus even more than his immediate family. (**Luke 14:26**)
- A disciple requires self-denial, complete dedication, willing obedience, and total commitment .....even unto death (**Luke 14:27**)
- A disciple surrenders everything for Jesus. (**Luke 14:33**)
- A disciple remains true to Jesus' words and teachings. (**John 8:31**)
- A disciple loves others as Jesus has loved him. (**John 13:34-35**)

Theologically we could add this: *The disciple of Christ must not only keep the faith and live on it, but also profess it, confidently bear witness to it, and spread it.*

### **The personal question still remains and needs to be answered:**

In the light of today's Gospel this leaves each of us with an important decision to make: *Do we believe we are personally called to be a disciple of Christ?* Perhaps, after reading the above definitions of a disciple, we are not so sure. That's OK. It just means we have come to realize that we cannot be a disciple on our own strength. This did not appear to be the case for the two men who came to Jesus as told in **Matthew 8:18-23**. Perhaps, that is why he challenged these would-be disciples so strongly. He wanted them to take a closer look at the job description before they signed up!

It wasn't that they were insincere. It is more they were not quite ready to take on the whole package of discipleship. The scribe told Jesus eagerly, *I will follow you wherever you go* (Matthew 8:19). But Jesus must have sensed he didn't understand what that meant. He might have followed him across the lake-but would he follow him to Jerusalem? Would he follow him to the cross? The other young man was already a disciple, and all he wanted to do was bury his father. So why didn't Jesus accept him immediately? He was not against this man honouring his family, but he wanted to see where his heart was.

### ***There are no lukewarm disciples. They are simply not disciples.***

As the example of these two men show us, discipleship depends on commitment. Though it doesn't always call us to travel to the ends of the earth or sever every family tie, it does require something more difficult: surrendering our will to the Lord. We may have the best of intentions and be very sincere, but we must also be willing to give up our strong attachments to this world's values and comforts. We cannot finish our journey with Jesus if we keep one foot on the shore in case things get rough!

Being a disciple of Christ requires that we die to ourselves and embrace the cross. When we do this, we find a new home in him. The sacrifices we make for him are nothing compared to the rewards we receive as his disciples, both in this world and in the next. No matter what storms are raging around us, we do have a place to lay our heads. And it's so much better than any comfort this world can offer us! Just as Jesus did during his time on earth, when we are troubled or tired we can call on God our Father. He will always refresh us and strengthen us. He will always empower us, by the power of his Spirit, to be Jesus' disciples.

If only each one of us could only believe this to be true and adjust our faith lives accordingly. With far too many lukewarm, uncommitted Christians claiming the Name of Jesus; too many willing to preach and proclaim Jesus but not wanting to get down and get dirty by living the Beatitudes, it is no wonder the world struggles to take our Gospel message seriously. There can be no Kingdom living, no joy and peace in living under the divine Rule of God without us including Golgotha in our daily spiritual living. The only way Jesus could arrive at Easter Sunday morning was through the grave. Why would we expect our lives to be any other way?