



Julian Smith *reflects on* Luke 14:25-33

Our TV screens are full of programmes about buying, selling, renovating or building houses. One long-running favourite begins by asking would-be builders or renovators how long they plan for the work to last and how big their budget is. At the end of the programme, when we've sat through disasters, overruns of time and money, and the worst weather ever, we learn how much the work actually cost. Often the difference between the initial budget and the final spend is huge.

In today's Gospel, Jesus speaks of the cost of discipleship. One of the examples he gives is of building a tower when, he says, you must ensure that you have enough money to complete the tower before you begin work. "Don't start what you can't finish," is the advice in essence.

The over-spenders on our TV screens may have ignored Jesus' advice about realistic costing, but their commitment is undeniable. The programme works because people are deeply committed to their

projects – whether it's breathing new life into a neglected house, or blending a modern eco-house into stunning scenery. They will beg, borrow, scrimp and save because they will not walk away from a project close to their hearts.

Jesus reminds us that discipleship can cost us everything – family, friends, even life itself. But following Jesus is the grandest of designs, and it requires our total commitment. ☺

Lord Jesus, you call us to follow you but the path of discipleship is hard. Give me the courage to walk that path each day and the willingness to give up everything for the sake of your kingdom. Amen.

How to keep faith in a wobbling world

Part 1 – introduction

by Caroline Hodgson

Thursday will see the twenty-fourth anniversary of the terrible 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and other locations in the USA, in which nearly three thousand people lost their lives.

As we watched, horror-stricken, the awful events unfolding on our TV screens, I remember a feeling of dread – the world was never going to be the same again. I don't imagine I was alone in that.

I'd experienced no personal loss, but the world felt a dangerous and uncertain place. Twenty-four years on, if anything it's even more wobbly. We're increasingly aware of the dire state of our precious planet; we've been through a pandemic that's shown us how fragile our global health is; we've seen war erupt in Europe and the terrible situation in the Middle East.

Over the next six weeks I'll be looking at ways of staying grounded in a wobbling world, and what part can faith play. ☺

People of the New Testament Stephen

by Caroline Fletcher

Acts 6-8:2; 11:19; 22:20.

Stephen delivers the longest speech in the Book of Acts and, indeed, one of the longest in the New Testament. That Luke, who wrote Acts, chose to include his speech suggests that he considered Stephen a very important figure in the early Church. Stephen was the first Christian to die for his faith and Luke wanted to emphasise that following Christ would mean walking in Jesus' footsteps and suffering as he had. In his Gospel (12:11-12), Luke describes Jesus warning his

followers that they would face persecution: "When they bring you before the... authorities, do not worry about how you are to defend yourselves or what you are to say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that very hour what you ought to say."

The inspired words of Stephen's speech were, in Luke's eyes, proof of the truth of Jesus' promise to help those who were persecuted in their time of need. It seems apt that Stephen, the first Christian martyr, should be remembered the day after we celebrate the birth of the man he gave up his life to follow. ☺

“Kindness is the noblest weapon to conquer with.”

Thomas Fuller (1608-1661), churchman and historian