

Dear Friends,

There are times in life when it falls to us to break bad news to someone else. We know that it isn't easy to find the right words to say. We may try to rehearse very carefully what we're going to say, but the words are never easy to find and sometimes they just won't come to us. But we do have to be honest with people. That was always true of Jesus, he was always honest with people, sometimes he was brutally honest.

Jesus didn't shrink from telling the disciples the bad news. In the gospel reading this week Jesus tells the disciples about his future suffering. He didn't try to hide from the disciples what lay ahead for him and for them. Being a disciple of Jesus wasn't an easy option, it wasn't about an instant transformation and then off to heaven. The Russian comedian Yakov Smirnov was amazed by all the instant products available in America on his first visit. He said on his first shopping trip he saw powdered milk, you just add water and you get milk. Then he saw powdered orange juice, you just add water and you get orange juice. Then he saw baby powder and thought to himself, "What an amazing country."

Being a disciple wasn't something that happened in an instant. There was a long journey ahead for the disciples. Jesus never gained followers by false pretences, he was very honest, brutally honest. We know when Churchill became prime minister he told the British people what he offered was blood, sweat and tears. A century earlier the Italian patriot Garibaldi said after the siege of Rome, "I have nothing to offer you but hunger and thirst, hardship and death, but I call on all who love their country to join with me." Jesus never pulled any punches, he told the truth, however difficult it was to face up to.

Jesus wouldn't have made a very good travel agent. He didn't promise a comfortable hotel with a sea view and easy access to the beach. He didn't paint a picture that was far more positive than the reality. Today more and more people are preferring to go on adventure holidays, rather than beach holidays. Jesus warns his followers that if they go his way it will be an adventure, it will be daunting. Jesus told his disciples that following him wouldn't be easy and it would be costly.

Jesus was honest about bad news, but he was also fundamentally one who brought good news. We often talk about the good news of Jesus, the good news of the gospel. We can be confident that if we follow in his way then he will lead us to God, and that most definitely is good news. It doesn't depend on what we do and whether we live a good enough life and do enough good deeds. The good news is that this new life is freely offered by God and is available to all.

Best wishes,

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