

The Season of Creation 2: Sacrifices needed for the sake of the Earth and the poor.

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SOC 2 – Mark 8.27-38

Mk 8.34 Jesus called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶ For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?

We've probably heard these words all our lives, and each time, we may have wondered what they're asking of *us*. Jesus calls to *the crowd* and the disciples, it says. This is Mark's way of saying that Jesus is looking straight out of the page at you and me – *the crowd*; it's Mark's way of saying Jesus is calling to each of us, and if we want to be his followers, we are meant to respond to this.

The words about gaining the whole world speak directly to me. I lack for nothing in this world. Yet I've just heard Jesus equate worldly gain with forfeiting life, and *losing life for his sake and for the sake of the Gospel* as the way of salvation. I'm strongly reminded of the words I quoted from Rev Sabelo Mthimkhulu last week. *Those of us who live comfortable lives, can no longer live as if we are ignorant of the links between our comforts – built on exploitative and unsustainable economic practices – and the suffering of the*

poor. ... So what's a way forward?

Roman Catholic social teaching has always been very forthright. Discussing today's gospel ^(in materials I've sent you), they make a clear link between *those who lose their life for Jesus' sake, and for the sake of the gospel* and the ones they call present-day climate martyrs. They write, '*people around the planet who are raising their prophetic voices for Care of Earth and Care of the Poor in these times are enduring the resistance, persecution, suffering, and death we hear about. They make up a community of the human martyrs of this age, joining the plants, animals and other species suffering extinction from the effects of human-generated climate change. These human martyrs have numbered between one and two hundred each year in the last two decades and represent all major areas of the planet: powerful witnesses calling us all to the seriousness of our mission and to courage and hope.*'

This is powerful teaching; it presents contemporary examples of people who *deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Jesus*. And it's very, very confronting for 'developed-world' Christians. It's a call to each of us to make real sacrifices for the sake of the Earth and for the sake of the Poor. I know that some of the goods and services I consume here cause the sufferings and deaths of poor people and wild creatures. If I wish to be a follower of Jesus, I *must* change the way I live, and I must urge people of influence to change the way the economy operates.

A story of economic regulations imposed on the economies of poor countries burdened by loans. These so-called 'structural adjustments' are required by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund who act on behalf of wealthy donor nations. The loan recipient countries are required to sell essential utilities to foreign bodies, and ordered to gear their primary industries – agriculture and resource extraction – so as to generate cash to service the loans. The fact that these

requirements are imposed on many countries, and many are required to produce the same 'cash crops' simultaneously mean that the World Bank can ensure that we of the rich world pay these countries rock-bottom prices for them, and so the loans can almost never be paid off; eg, sugar in the 1980s and palm oil now.

If I wish to be a follower of Jesus, I *must* change the way I live, and I must urge people of influence to change the way the world economy operates. As a group, we're not good at hearing this. We sing God's praises for the plenty we enjoy. But if we get fired up to protest, it's about personal liberties being infringed by others – like the Taliban's treatment of women and girls, or other repressive governments' unfair control of their citizens.

Yet when it comes to the effect of our *developed*-world economic system on the Earth-community and the poor of this world, as a society and as a church, we're often deaf, or we think we have no voice.

There are loud voices out there who champion the status quo – angry, dangerous, false voices that intimidate and ridicule to silence the truth. It's always been so; witness Good Friday.

But as followers of Jesus, we answer to the God who calls us to serve and protect the Earth, and in the Spirit's strength, to proclaim good news to the poor and to set the oppressed free. Time is short, and the call is crystal clear to all of us. And of course, it's risky to do this; our lifestyle will need to change.

This is how I hear Jesus' words today; *Jesus calls us, and says to us, 'If you want to be my followers, deny yourselves and take up your cross and follow me.*

In their joint statement, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Pope Francis and Archbishop Justin link our experience of the Covid pandemic with the climate catastrophe in terms of the

importance of justice. They remind us how we've 'realised that, in facing this worldwide calamity [of Covid-19], no one is safe until everyone is safe, that our actions really do affect one another, and that what we do today affects what happens tomorrow.

These are not new lessons, but we have had to face them anew. May we not waste this moment. We must decide what kind of world we want to leave to future generations. God mandates: 'Choose life, so that you and your children might live' (Deut 30:19). We must choose to live differently; we must choose life.' Amen