**Sermon Matthew 16 21-28 CCSV 2020**

**“From that time on”-these are the key words in our Gospel reading this morning- “From that time on” – to understand these words-we need to discover ‘why’ and ‘when’ they were spoken -and to ‘whom’. For almost three years- Jesus has been travelling the area around Lake Galilee- into every town and village-telling wonderful stories- creating incredible miracles- healing the ills and deformities of**

**thousands of men, women and children. Wherever there was Jesus-there were crowds- eager to see and hear this new charismatic leader.**

**++Jesus understood that the market for his message in Galilee was over- if he wanted his ministry to grow- he had to go to Jerusalem- timing it for the week of the Passover celebrations- with many thousands of new listeners. There would be opposition- powerful opposition- the Sadducees, the Pharisees, the Herodians and the Chief Priests in the temple- the religious establishment- who would do anything to get rid of him. Ahead of him were new crowds- but betrayal and death.**

**++ Travelling with him was a small entourage of followers-**

**centred around twelve men he had personally chosen to be his inner circle- fishermen,field workers, a tax collector. They are feeling pretty good as his disciples- the master’s popularity flowing over to them-filled with the excitement of being with Jesus- they even argue amongst themselves who will be his right hand man. When Peter declares that he is the long-awaited Messiah-Jesus tells him that he will be the leader of his church.**

**++For a few minutes-you become Peter way back then. Wow! being with Jesus is really great! Then-all of a sudden-**

**things change…Jesus tells you what you don’t want to hear-**

**about going to Jerusalem- about power politics-about betrayal- even about suffering and death. This doesn’t fit with what will happen when the Messiah comes! Like all Jews-you believe that the Messiah will bring victory over your enemies-and glory to Israel. So listening to Jesus-you**

**are confused and upset. The Messiah must be a hero not a victim. Exasperated-you take Jesus aside and burst out “ No Lord! Stop talking about suffering and death. There must be a better way to be our leader-the way of betrayal and pain makes no sense! “**

**++You think the world of Jesus-you gave up fishing to follow him-you want Jesus to be the hero you love-a great leader-not a dead man in a grave.++ Jesus answers you- not in anger-but with a kind of gentle sadness-“ You really don’t understand who I am-and what the Kingdom of God is all about-Satan is using you Peter- to tempt me away from my destiny.”**

**++ You and I are often like Peter- we build up for ourselves this fantastic image of Jesus….teacher-healer-preacher-miracle worker-spreading love where he goes-all of which is true-but incomplete. We forget that Jesus was just as human as you and me-no more, no less. When we make him like the best of science fiction- a super superman-we deny his reality. *That’s the evil power of Satan getting into OUR***

***minds!* The human Jesus had the same free will that we have- and his response always brought out the real person he was-an obedient son of his Father.**

***++* A DISCIPLE is one who trusts-follows- learns from-and**

**obeys his leader. The hearts and minds of Peter and the disciples were set on success in the world- not in God’s Kingdom- their Messiah would be a winner- not a loser! Jesus’ plan to develop a great team of disciples to carry out his ministry- looked pretty bleak. *So “from that time on”-* he had to take them away from the crowds and the glamour-and mold them into real disciples. And he starts by uttering these words which they -and we-find difficult to accept……*Deny yourself-take up your cross and follow me***

**++ I believe it is God’s will that I should be fully the person he created me to be-that would make me a real disciple. It’s God’s will that you should be fully the person he created you to be-that would make you a real disciple. I can’t be a puppet-with God pulling the strings-neither can you. Only if I am free to make choices-am I able to grow into that real person-otherwise I’m an unthinking robot. Sadly-that freedom often makes myself the centre of the universe-instead of God- resulting in a mixture of love and obedience**

**in my life. “ You must stop doing that” says Jesus-“ you must move away from being self-centred-to living a life which is God centred. I am not asking you to stop being the**

**special person God created you to be. *Denying yourself means saying yes to God-and when you do that-the result is the real you!* The real me will take all the gifts God has given me-even the ones I haven’t found about yet- and use them for his service and glory- not my own. Only then can the real me shine forth-a me who is truly alive in a world where God needs me to do his work. That’s ‘denying myself’-and it’s not easy- day after day-one day at a time-that’s being a real disciple-but it can only happen if I put my complete trust in God.**

**++You and I have had our own “from that time on’-since the middle of march-including a ‘deny yourself’-not God driven-but a worldly virus driven. Faith in the Lord-and each other- have kept us together as a fellowship. Shortly we’ll be able to worship together again-with a few changes to keep us safe- the disciples of Christ Church beginning a**

**new chapter in their journey. The result will be adventure-but also frustration….excitement but also hardship….joy but also pain- and a peace of mind which can only come from having a true relationship of love with the Lord. *We are complete-we are truly and fully alive-personally and collectively-not when we work to make life comfortable-secure-rewarding-convenient….but when we take the big step-put our whole trust in God-deny ourselves-take up whatever crosses Jesus hands us-and follow him….walking in a world where love is the foundation-and we’ll experience***

***what life as a disciple is all about. That will be the start of our new “from that time on”.* Amen.**