



**St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey**  
**Sunday, 4 September – Trinity 12**  
**Readings: Philemon & St Luke 14: 25-33**  
**Given by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard**

**Words that convey, their meaning**

Two words popped out at me from the Paul's letter to Philemon: 'command' and 'appeal'. Appealing to someone, who has freedom of choice, is far more likely to gain an effective result than a strident command. Though some of Paul's letters can be forthright in the messages they convey, his letter to Philemon, written from prison, shows his softer side. He appeals to Philemon's Christian love rather than issuing a command to receive back Onesimus, his runaway slave. It seems that Onesimus had found his way to Paul and in ministering to Paul's needs in prison, he is a transformed character. In sending him back to Philemon, Paul appeals to receive Onesimus no longer as a slave but on equal terms, as a beloved brother in Christ. The feel-good factor from this account is heart-warming. But! Turning to the gospel, we slam straight into Jesus' harsh words. Does Jesus really want us to hate father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, possession and even life itself? This appears to be no appeal but a tough command. Imagine, if these words were used in the liturgy of a baptism, confirmation or, ordination service, I wonder how many people would say their vows without batting an eyelid and stay to the end of the service? More likely, horrified, they would bolt for the door!

**Seeing the bigger picture**

So, why is Jesus giving this strident command, when his main message is to project the love of God? This is one of these bible readings when we need to step back from the immediate words and see the bigger picture depicted by Luke. He tells us that vast crowds are travelling with Jesus. This is not the first time that Jesus has been mobbed by countless thousands, as he walked and talked throughout his ministry. The crowds are enthralled by him, why wouldn't they be? They may have received his healing touch or, witnessed his many miracles. Then there was his ability to produce fast-food from just five rolls and a couple of small fish. And, he's even gone head-to-head with the self-righteous Pharisees and Synagogue Leaders pointing up the flaws in their entrenched beliefs and silencing them. In the crowd's eyes Jesus is a celebrity, maybe, even the Messiah who is written about in the scriptures. Now, as they follow him, they realise that he's on his way to Jerusalem. They sense that a Rubicon moment is building. Perhaps Jesus will overthrow the Roman regime? No more Roman taxes and constraints would mean that life could return to normal. Their conquering hero could re-establish the glory days of King David and King Solomon: that was their mindset; they craved a return to the past forgetting the inequalities and inconsistencies of how past generations observed their faith or, not!

## Reality Check

Jesus' words hope to dispel their star-struck eyes with a harsh reality check. His message, tries to convey that his way is a new world order. It's not about dog-eat-dog but self-sacrifice. He tells them bluntly, if you want to be my disciples you have to make tough judgement calls even to the point of leaving your family and possessions even giving up your life for your faith. We know with the benefit of the gospel accounts that the road to Jerusalem is not to shed other peoples' blood. Rather, it leads to the cross, at calvary and Jesus' shed blood, for our salvation. No one gives up their life in God's service because they hate people. Rather, it's because they love them enough to put them first, before their own desires, thereby echoing the two greatest commandments.

## What possesses our minds, possesses our actions

How we apply Christ's command in our own lives, as his disciples, is a matter for each one of us to reconcile personally. It's good to give ourselves a daily reality check to discern if there is anything, that keeps us from loving God unconditionally and seeing a beloved child of God in everyone: for what possesses our minds, possesses our actions. Putting it succinctly, do we serve God on his terms or, our own? When I find myself wanting, I like simple solutions to help me get back on track. I often find effective prompts in the words of hymns. The first verse of the Offertory Hymn we'll sing, is both simple and effective, when we sing it may it be our prayer:

'Teach me, my God and King  
in all things thee to see;  
and what I do in anything,  
to do it, as for thee.'

Amen.