

Trinity 15 2021 (Sunday 12th September 2021)
8am at Ewhurst James 3:1-12 & Mark 8:27-end

I once sat talking to a lady in a hospital ward, beside the body of her husband who had just died – it was a chance meeting, I had been there to visit somebody else, but the ward sister had asked me if I could spare her a moment.

The woman was suffering immense grief. But while talking with her, I became aware that her grief wasn't for her husband who had just died (that hadn't yet sunk in). Rather, it was grief for her child who had died almost 60 years previously. But at the time of her child's death, she had not taken the time to grieve properly – she had only healed over the surface. The wound was still raw deep inside. So that now, with this new death, it had all erupted, perhaps for the first time!

Wounds will only heal properly if they heal from the inside. And that can be a painful process. It involves facing up to suffering – embracing it and letting it run its course! When people are experiencing that sort of grief they need to be encouraged to feel their pain even when they don't want to. Sometimes it means helping them to see the truth about themselves, even though that truth is intensely painful!

And this is precisely what Jesus did. He confronted suffering headlong. He made no attempt to evade or avoid it, but he walked straight towards it! At any time, he could have walked away, but he didn't! He chose a path that he knew would lead him to the Calvary cross. He did it out of love, and the result was a healing beyond anything anyone could ever have imagined. The result was resurrection, new life!

And that's the result for all of us if we're prepared to actually face our own afflictions. Suffering is a part of human life. We all suffer at some time or another. But that suffering is also an opportunity for deep healing to occur within us so that we can become whole. So that we

can become more real, more integrated. So that we too can experience resurrection, new life.

Jesus said: *"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow me."* Peter and the other disciples discovered the cost of that very early on – quite soon after Jesus had ascended, and they started their missionary work. But they had enough strength through the Holy Spirit, the God within them, to face that suffering for the sake of their integrity.

Most of us are no longer called upon to face that sort of suffering for the Gospel. But we are called to face our own inner sufferings. To go through them, rather than trying to side-step it or to deny them.

Jesus said: *" those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and the sake of the Gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world, and forfeit their life?."*

Jesus is telling us gain, that the way of God has different values to the way of the world – that if we allow ourselves to suffer, we'll find out who and what we really are, and we'll change, deep inside.

As Christians, our job isn't to pat each other on the head and say: *"There, there!"* Anyone can do that. Our job is a much more demanding one. It's to enable each other to suffer. To have the courage to share each other's pain, so that deep wounds may heal from the inside, out. It's to help each other take up the cross!