Trinity 12C Luke 14:25-33 07/09/2025

Have you ever watched the famous western movie starring Oscar winning John Wayne, called *True Grit* ? As a young boy I loved this gun toting western with Marshall Rooster Cogburn. Where the baddies get shot up by the goodie and the young girl saved. John Wayne was pretty old when he played the part, in fact he was seventy- still jumping onto horses. So there is hope for all of us!

*"*Grit" is trending these days. In a nutshell, "grit" is mental toughness, the ability to persevere and keep at it in order to achieve a long-term goal. Like calculating what it is going to take to build that big tower and then keeping after it, no matter that a storm knocked it down or that the permit got delayed or that thieves stole the materials, just keep calculating and working until it stands tall for all to see and admire. Is this calculated Christianity, this determined discipleship, about grit? Is Jesus telling us to be gritty followers?

Two breaking of sieges in history that changed world events centred on one small island- Malta, a little island in the Mediterranean Sea between Africa and Europe. The breaking of those two sieges were major turning points in history and were exemplars in some ways of 'true grit'. The first in 1565 involved the Knights of St John and the people of Malta, aided by the Spanish, for they withstood a siege for over three months by vastly more powerful and numerical forces led by the Ottoman Turks. Grand Master of the vastly outnumbered Knights, Jean Parisot de Valette had indeed as we heard in the parable this morning prepared and calculated well for the upcoming battle. (Eternally grateful for his valour and courage the people of Malta named their capital city after him Valletta.) Their situation appeared hopeless with imminent defeat, slaughter and slavery and yet more importantly than any "true grit" they placed their trust in the Lord with and for the people of Malta. The very cross they bore on their chests let everyone know their mission. They literally placed their lives on the line in the name of Christ for others. There was a very clear sense that those few Knights and the future of the Maltese people and the whole of western Christianity was in God's hands.

Interestingly some nearly four hundred years later my father who served in the Royal Navy during WW2 was involved in one of the operations to break the second siege of Malta by the Axis powers in *Operation Vigorous* in June 1942. His ship *HMS Newcastle* along with seven other light cruisers were escorts of a convoy from Alexandria taking supplies to Malta to break the siege. My Dad's ship was torpedoed by an E boat (E stood for Enemy- they were fast light torpedo boats used against merchant shipping) and *HMS Newcastle* limped back to Alexandria, eventually the convoy turned back, but it helped the final breaking of the siege of Malta by *Operation Pedestal,* interestingly also in about three months in August 1942. In the few words my father ever said about all of his war service I got the distinct impression that it was his faith and trust in God that got him through. That time and again on that ship whether in the North Atlantic escorting convoys of merchant ships, the South Atlantic the Pacific and this case the Mediterranean he placed his life with the rest of the crew on the line in the name of God, King and Country for the people under oppression of the Axis powers, including the people of Malta.

What both defeats of the sieges of Malta show was that calculated Christianity is not about our brains or our talents, our might or power. It is about accepting God's will, power, grace, compassion, mercy, and love. There is not enough grit and good works in the world to make us worthy to be counted among Jesus' followers, but yet, we are.

We will never be smart enough to know the mind of God because our thoughts are not God's thoughts. And yet we are promised that Christ makes his home in our hearts. We are the clay and God is the potter. Faithful discipleship is about being shaped by the most high God again and again. It is not about our righteousness or abilities, our successes or our failures, it is about trusting and seeking to follow the one who came to save sinners. How do we measure the price and the impact of these things? Which one of you, of us, could possibly do them without the help of the One through whom all things are possible?

Jesus' admonishment to the crowds in the Gospel and to us is a call to calculate the cost so that we know only he can pay the price. Only then will we live our lives in joyous gratitude for Jesus' sacrifice, for the amazing grace that meets us where we are, but never leaves us as we've been found.

I cannot hate my parents or my spouse or my child, and my life is far too filled with blessings for me to be anything but grateful. But I know I can only love them all rightly when I put Jesus Christ first, when I recognise and know to the marrow of my bones that I have been saved by grace.

The truth is, I could give away all I own and still not make a dent in the debt I owe the One who went to the cross in my stead.

We can never calculate what discipleship requires, we can only surrender to the potter and be shaped in surprising ways that God will use beyond all we could ever imagine or do on our own, no matter how determined we are. I am sure that was the enduring feeling amongst those besieged or trying to break the siege on the tiny island of Malta so many years ago.

Which one of you could ever calculate the value of knowing Jesus Christ? Discipleship, both the gift and the responsibility of it, is priceless, all we can do is offer God whatever we have, in faith and humility, trusting that Jesus will take it, bless it, and shape it for the building of his kingdom and his victory over everything that could separate us and others from his love. That's the formula for following Jesus and, thanks be to God, the only calculation that truly matters. Amen.

Fr Robert Newton