

The Arusha Call to Discipleship

The Way of the Cross – Challenging Privilege

The World Council of Churches' Conference on World Mission and Evangelism met in Arusha, Tanzania, in March 2018. From this meeting the more than 1,000 participants, who were all regularly engaged in mission and evangelism, issued the Arusha Call to Discipleship.

At our own national church General Synod in 2019, resolution A-129 was passed that we affirm the Arusha Call; encourage bodies within the General Synod to integrate this call into the guiding principles of baptismal living for the shaping of national ministries; and commend the Arusha Call to dioceses for study and inclusion in their considerations of evangelism, witness and discipleship.

For the past year, Spiritual Development Team members and others have offered reflections on the 12 points within this call. The final reflection, from Archbishop David, will follow in the September edition. This month's reflection, # 11, is by Cheryl Jacobs.

Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me." Luke 9:23 NIV

Take up your cross, the Saviour said, if you would my disciple be; deny yourself, the world forsake, and humbly follow after me.

This familiar hymn, originally from a poem by Charles Everest, was sung at the worship service I was attending in Lent. I would say it was very familiar to me, but this time the third verse particularly struck me as if for the first time:

Take up your cross, nor heed the shame, and let your foolish pride be still: your Lord for you endured to die upon a cross, on Calvary's hill.

I, personally, am not a big fan

of being shamed. Of course, as a person of European descent, privileged by good income and education, perhaps I am not often in a situation of being ashamed.

In fact, most of my feelings of shame are because I "have left undone those things which [I] ought to have done ... and have done those things which [I] ought not to have done."

Part of the human condition, yes, and forgiven by the grace of our loving God, but a shame of my own making.

Many people, however, are made to feel shame, not for things of their own choosing, but rather because of their race, skin tone, language, biological sex, sexuality, or because they understand themselves as different from the general cultural norms.

Many of us have recently been enjoying listening to National Indigenous Archbishop Mark MacDonald. In April, while speaking to an Ottawa group on the reconciliation efforts by the Anglican Church of Canada, Archbishop Mark noted that most racism is inadvertent. These ways are encoded in us and "the ceiling" is invisible to those who impose it.

We Canadians typically identify with the descriptors "nice" and "fair," and we find it hard to accept that systemic racism is a thing.

This, however, is certainly no excuse for us.

Jesus, Word, set aside glory to be one of us. As a human, he did nothing of which to be ashamed, yet took on our sin and shame at Golgotha so that we could be free to be truly human. Is this freedom given to some to be privileged above others, to then keep others from being free?

No! Elitism, privilege, personal and structural power are not the plan of God. In fact, as 1 Corinthians 1: 27-29 says: Isn't it obvious that God deliberately chose men and women that the culture overlooks and exploits and abuses, chose these "nobodies" to expose the hollow pretensions

We are called to follow the way of the cross, which challenges elitism, privilege, personal and structural power (Luke 9:23).

CAROLYN V ON UNSPLASH

The text of the Arusha Call:

As disciples of Jesus Christ, both individually and collectively:

- We are called by our baptism to transforming discipleship: a Christ-connected way of life in a world where many face despair, rejection, loneliness, and worthlessness.
- We are called to worship the one Triune God—the God of justice, love, and grace—at a time when many worship the false god of the market system (Luke 16:13).
- We are called to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ—the fullness of life, the repentance and forgiveness of sin, and the promise of eternal life—in word and deed, in a violent world where many are sacrificed to the idols of death (Jeremiah 32:35) and where many have not yet heard the gospel.
- We are called to joyfully engage in the ways of the Holy Spirit, who empowers people from the margins with agency, in the search for justice and dignity (Acts 1:8; 4:31).
- We are called to discern the word of God in a world that communicates many contradictory, false, and confusing messages.
- We are called to care for God's creation, and to be in solidarity with nations severely affected by climate change in the face of a ruthless human-centered exploitation of the environment for consumerism and greed.
- We are called as disciples to belong together in just and inclusive communities, in our quest for unity and on our ecumenical journey, in a world that is based upon marginalization and exclusion.
- We are called to be faithful witnesses of God's transforming love in dialogue with people of other faiths in a world where the politicization of religious identities often causes conflict.
- We are called to be formed as servant leaders who demonstrate the way of Christ in a world that privileges power, wealth, and the culture of money (Luke 22:25-27).
- We are called to break down walls and seek justice with people who are dispossessed and displaced from their lands—including migrants, refugees and asylum seekers—and to resist new frontiers and borders that separate and kill (Isaiah 58:6-8).
- **We are called to follow the way of the cross, which challenges elitism, privilege, personal and structural power (Luke 9:23).**
- We are called to live in the light of the resurrection, which offers hope-filled possibilities for transformation.

of the "somebodies"?

That makes it quite clear that none of you can get by with blowing your own horn before God. (The Message)

Jesus goes on to say in Luke 9: "What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?" (vs 25)

If we believe that Jesus is Lord of an eternal kingdom and that promise is for us, then really 'what good is it' to be one of the elite here and now? 'What good is' one's privilege? 'What good is' power in this world, when it will always be nothing compared to God's power?

So then, what does it mean to follow the way of the cross, to take it up daily?

At least in part, it means

that we need to work harder to understand our own privilege, elitism, selfishness, and blindness — and we need to do this personally and as church communities.

Perhaps church communities can agree to hold each other accountable on privilege and racism. Let us talk together and ask BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour), the LGBTQIA+ community, the homeless and other vulnerable persons to call us out when our attitudes are wrong.

As Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby says in his introduction to the Difference course: "When... we begin to handle diversity creatively and sincerely, honouring one another in our deep difference...

we can begin to flourish together in previously unthinkable ways." Perhaps, too, we should question why the Church is struggling so much to be back in the place of power it occupied for many of the last centuries and instead, seek to be the subversive agents for love in this world that God intended.

Take up your cross, let not its weight fill your weak soul with vain alarm; his strength shall bear your spirit up, and brace your heart, and nerve your arm.

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