

# WEEKLY SERMON

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## The Challenges of choosing Jesus

What images spring to mind when you think of Jesus?

Many will go in their minds to the pictures of their childhood: Jesus the Good Shepherd tenderly leading his sheep or Jesus the friend of the young holding a child in his arms.

Most of us think of Jesus as the man of peace, someone who exudes calm, who reconciles, who is gentle and compassionate.

So why then in Luke Chapter 12 does Jesus say this?

*'Do you suppose that I am here to bring peace on earth? No I tell you, but rather division.'*

That simply doesn't sound like the sort of thing that Jesus should be saying.

It's a million miles away from the cosy images, and moreover those words sound especially uncomfortable in an age that fears religious extremism and violence. No wonder preachers so often steer away from such 'hard sayings' of Jesus.

What on earth does he mean?

What Jesus is *not* doing is exhorting us to violence.

Instead he is confronting us with the challenges of choosing for him. So much of St Luke's Gospel is about the need to decide.

Right at the very beginning of the Gospel, Jesus' own mother is challenged by Simeon in the Temple to decide whether her little boy is indeed the long-awaited Messiah and that challenge is repeated throughout the Gospel.

But making that decision has implications and these can be costly. Jesus wanted people to understand and accept that cost before they decided; which is why he used such provocative and difficult language. Jesus knows that some will choose to follow him whilst others will not, and that will inevitably cause divisions within families and communities.

It is impossible to be a 'half-Christian'.

Either we give our whole lives to Jesus Christ or we do not ... and still today the decision to follow him will have uncomfortable consequences.

Our faith in Jesus Christ may mean we are misunderstood by family members, teased at school, side-lined in the work place or misrepresented in wider society.

HEALTHY CHURCHES TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES

Being a Christian is by its very nature controversial. That is the cost of following Jesus.

But once we have made that decision, the benefits are incalculable. For the peace that Jesus offers us is not the tense stand-off that characterises so much human relationship, but a profound and lasting peace with God that is wrought through the blood of the cross.

His peace is a true peace, one that the world simply cannot give, a peace that we can delight and a peace that we can share.

**Bishop Philip**