

Matthew's weekly musing, 28th August 2020

I'm musing on people who walk towards the truth and I'm shocked by my emotions as I put myself in their shoes. Here are the names of three who are stirring my thoughts: Yulia Tymoshenko (Ukraine), Sviatlana Tsikhanouskanya (Belarus), Alexy Navalny (Russia).

Each has become the voice of protest and plea for democracy.

Words which come to mind: vulnerable, frightened, harassed, torn between commitment to family and commitment to the flow of history, refugee, poisoned.

Would I be prepared to be the one who stands out of the crowd and stands up for the truth as I perceive it? Thank God I live in a country with the privileges of stability and reliable institutions – by which I mean, for example, the traditional media, our legal system and established governance.

Earlier this week these thoughts brought a cold shiver to my spine as I read the Gospel for the week, especially v21:

Matthew 16

- 21** From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.
- 22** And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you."
- 23** But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."
- 24** Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?"
- 27** "For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. ²⁸ Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

Jesus walked towards the truth, and it was a lonely walk. He even had to stand up to Peter. He walked with firm resolve, energised by love of you and me, sheltered by the Father's will, buoyed by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

How can I respond? Of course I respond with worship, with daily chats with Him (prayer), with my own seeking for the Father's will and purposes.

At this point v24 breaks into my confidence and ease as a Christian of many years. What does it mean to “deny self and take up my cross and follow”?

At the obvious level it means to pick up the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount, and work towards a life of Christian values and morality and ethics. So I seek to live a life of integrity at work, or when dealing with tradespeople, or when filling in a tax return. I seek to be civilised and cheery and respectful in all my dealings.

At the less obvious level (and it is the level which has the feel of a tart apple or acrid cleaning fluid), do I make choices that disappoint me? That disappoint my desires? That take me out of the flow of what my peers are doing? I'll give some examples.

- Do I deliberately pay a 5% premium for electricity so that the sourcing is green?
- Do I choose a vehicle which has a low carbon footprint both in its manufacturing process and its day-to-day running? (The answer to that of course shrinks the size of the vehicle and its engine).
- Do my holidays show respect for environment and others?
- Do I give of my spare time for the benefit of others?

My choices may be known only to me, or family, or close friends. Most importantly my answers reveal to God whether I am following his Son, and whether my quest for holiness is penetrating to the depths of who I am.

There is a reward for holiness. Jesus says so in v27. But don't be fooled into thinking the reward is some kind of *Trumpian Mar-a-Lago*. The reward we feel deeply will be a smile on the face of the Father.