

## Fourth Sunday in Lent – If anyone would be my disciple . . . (Mark 8:34)

The call to deny ourselves is not only counter-cultural but counter-intuitive. It is our recognition of human rights and dignity that motivates and informs much of our commitment to social justice. How, in the light of this are we to understand Christ's call to self-denial?

Are we simply invited to passively accept those injustices that deny and undermine human dignity? Is the cross simply a symbol of quiet submission?

The Psalms speak of God fashioning our inmost being. As we pause to explore the person that God has made us to be, we might also recognise the identities and personas that this world can place upon us. These are identities that define borders, create barriers, measure worth, include some and leave others outside.

As we learn to leave these "selves" behind, so we discover more of our common humanity with those that some would define as "other". And so we become dissatisfied with a world that excludes and discriminates, that fabricates labels like "migrant" and "stranger"; where the needy are left without refuge when they fail to fit the moulds of acceptability and worth.

Who am I?

What is this self that you call me to deny?

Who are you calling us to become

Amidst a world of identities and boundaries, personalities and status?

In the self we leave behind,

Lie the trappings of a world that would press us into its mould;

Imposing its narratives of difference and discrimination;

Protecting interests that we have learned not to question.

But as we journey deeper

Into the person you have made us to be,

We discover in the face of each stranger,

The shared hopes and common accord of a fellow traveller.

For your call to discipleship extends beyond our human boundaries

Transcending the temporary divisions of this world

And through the common journey that you call us all to follow

Human need and dignity comes to matter more than borders.

In the solitude of the desert

The stranger seeking refuge becomes a potential companion

Their presence brings hope and the joy of shared humanity

In every encounter, lives are enriched and threats diminish

So help us learn the lessons of self-denial

And recognise that our places of plenty remain deserts for some

Barren, cold and unwelcoming wildernesses of rejection

Where beacons of hope can still be defiantly kindled.