

**A Sermon by the Reverend Timothy A R Cole
The Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
Home Coming Sunday
Sunday, September 8, 2019**

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Psalm 1

Philemon 1-21

Luke 14:25-33

Hands up all the young people here. What have I got in my bag? It is short and thin. Made of metal and Jesus and Joseph would have used a lot of them?

Explain each phrase.

“ For the want of a nail a shoe was lost; for the want of a shoe a horse was lost; for the want of a horse a knight was lost; for the want of a knight a skirmish was lost; for the want of a skirmish a battle was lost; for the want of a battle the war was lost; for the want of the war a kingdom was lost; **so**, for the want of a nail, a kingdom was lost.”

Little things can have big consequences. The fate of a country can sometimes literally hang on a nail. Our lives are not made up of nails, of course, but they are made up of choices. All of us make choices all of the

time, and those choices can have big consequences that we have no idea about at the time.

As we bless these back packs this Homecoming Sunday we are praying for you as you launch into a new school term.

Some things you don't have any choice about. You have to go to school whether you like it or not!

I remember my daughter Emily coming home from her first day at school. I asked her how it went, and she said, "It was OK Dad, but I don't think I will go back." Of course, we made her go back because it is the law that we did and because we knew that education was essential for her.

You can't choose not to go to school, but you do have a lot of choices to make about what you do there. Are you going to choose to work hard? Are you going to choose to be kind to the people around you? Are you going to choose to tell the truth, be fair, be a good friend, be respectful of your teachers and your parents? All these things are in the end up to you. We all go to school, but not everyone takes full advantage of what is on offer there. One famous teacher was reminded of someone who was a student of his. He replied; "Ah yes, he came to all my lectures, but he was never a student of mine!"

The same is true of the faith we are part of here. We may all come to Church but we still have to choose whether we are going to be people who just go through the motions or whether we choose to be real students, real disciples of Jesus who are prepared to make our following of him the most important thing we do.

In today's Gospel Jesus is, of course, not really saying that we should hate our families. If you think about it we often say things we don't literally mean. I might say "I am so hungry I could eat a horse!" Do you think I really mean I could eat a horse? No. I just mean that I am really, really hungry! I am not lying. I am just using words to underline how I feel. Jesus does the same here when he says

"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."

He is really saying, what I am talking about is really important. Even more important than the things that mean the most to you in the world. If you want to be my follower, you have to be prepared to commit your whole self to it. You have to be prepared to choose me even when that is a very very hard thing to do.

So as you head to school each day, and when you come here each week, remember this small nail, that, because it wasn't there, meant a whole Kingdom was lost. Remember and think of each choice you make to do the right thing, the kind thing, the hard-working thing, the honorable thing, the thing that you believe Jesus would want you to do to; and think that is like the nail upon which the Kingdom depended. If you do that, some of those choices you make, will save Kingdoms and will certainly make you a citizen of one Kingdom in particular, Christ's Kingdom.

Now, I would ask you just to sit quietly for a minute while I say a few words to the older people here this morning.

We live in pretty tough times in some ways. Not compared to our forefathers and mothers that lived through the Civil War and the great World Wars of this century perhaps, but tough in other ways. Hurricane Dorian and storms like it are terribly physically destructive. Part of the horror of them, as well as the loss of life, is that they leave people without the homes. We think of our homes, as places of shelter and safety and when we see other people's homes deroofed or destroyed, it is profoundly disturbing.

Yet there are other storms that are perhaps more destructive. Storms of bitterness and hate, where civil discourse and respect gives way to name calling and howls of derision. Where honorable disagreement, argument and debate, are reduced to belittling, labeling and a sneer. I think this is the real storm we are living through today. And whether this is done by a shopkeeper, a lawyer, a clergyperson, or by media personalities or politicians in high office, when we hear it, we feel the roof has been ripped off the home we all live in together. If we tell our children to make good choices in this coming term, tell them that their choices are nails that can save a country, then we need to do the same. So much can hang upon so little. A word that is true or one that is a lie, a word of life or a word of death.

Christ Church is our spiritual home, and at its heart, is Christ, the good word, the word of life, the Word made flesh. Here we know who we are.

Here we are fed. Here our wounds are bound up. Here we are known and loved by God and by, in as much as our poor hearts allow, each other.

Here is somewhere strong and safe where we can nurture our children, like young Cesi Foster there, who we baptize today and make part of Christ's family across the world, as well as of our own Christ Church family here.

But all that is not the only purpose of this sanctuary that God has raised up for us here against the storm. Perhaps the most important function of any

home is that it makes us strong enough to go back out each day into the fray and make good choices. We bless the young people's back packs and we bless our own adult burdens, the crosses that we must carry each day well and in Christ's name. The message to us of this morning's readings is very clear. Choices matter and we have a life and death choice to make each day. Like Jesus' mother Mary, when she is told she is pregnant by the angel, we don't always get to choose what happens to us, Mary didn't to choose to be pregnant or not, but we do get to choose how we react to it. We can rant and rave at our crosses and how unfair they are, or we can say, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to your word."

So this Homecoming let us all go to the schools of life that we have no choice but to attend, let us take up the crosses that Christ gives us to carry, and let us be joyful and glad, because, like Mary, in saying yes to them, we are saying yes to life and yes to God. These yeses are the nails that will mend our homes and remake the roof of our own lives, and that of our country and our humanity.

Children – you have been very patient. I want to ask you to do one more thing. I want you to welcome young Cesi and everyone here home to Christ Church. After three. "Welcome home!! Say yes to God!!"

