**Don’t be a chicken!**

**What it really means to say yes to Jesus**

Has anyone ever played the game ‘Chicken’? It was a game which was a bit of a craze a few years ago, and not always in a positive way. The participants in the game would set a dare for someone else; often the dare might involve doing something quite dangerous or risky, and if the person being given the dare refused to take up to the challenge they would be in for all sorts of ridicule, mocking, and teasing – and they’d be labelled a ‘chicken’.

It wasn’t necessarily a very pleasant game, but I think it would be appropriate to use the concept of ‘chicken’ here today. Here we go!... I dare you to follow Jesus: to be his disciple, to do what he asks, go where he sends, and live as he demands. And I want to make a very bold assertion; this may not be a challenge that many people are willing to *fully* accept, but let’s think about what it would involve.

**Chicken or eagle?**I want to start by telling you the old fable of the eagle egg which was shaken out of its nest by an earthquake and rolled down the mountainside into a chicken coop.

Instinctively, one of the hens sat on the eagle egg until one day it hatched, and an eaglet was born. Unfortunately, it didn’t realise that it was an eagle, it thought it was a chicken. And being raised by other chickens, the eagle just copied what it saw, and learned to strut around pecking grain.

The eagle was quite content with its life as a chicken, but often looked up and saw the eagles soaring above and would tell his chicken family how much he’d love to be able to soar like that. Of course, the chickens told him that it was impossible; chickens just aren’t made to soar, they just peck grain. And so that eagle, with all its potential, lived its whole life doing nothing more than strutting around and pecking grain.

I wonder how many people are proverbially living ‘grain-pecking’ lives when God has created and called them to soar. And I often wonder what causes people to be content to live far beneath their God-given potential: doubt, fear, peer pressure, or cultural expectations? If you sense that you’re pecking when you should be soaring, then perhaps it’s time to get out of the chicken coop!

**Crowd or disciple?**

When Jesus called his very first disciples, he encountered them going about their ordinary, everyday lives as fisherman:

‘As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” At once they left their nets and followed him.

‘Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.’ (Matthew 4:18-22)

I want to point out what Jesus was *not* asking of these fishermen.

* He was *not*, at this point, asking for any theological understanding or doctrinal correctness; that all came *much* later.
* He was *not* asking them to make an adjustment to their schedule in order that a portion of their time could be given over to him.
* He was *not* suggesting that they gave his invitation some thought and worked through all of the questions and doubts that they might have had (and there would, surely, have been some of those too) before they made their decision to follow or not.

He *was* asking them to act with complete faith and trust in him, to physically leave everything they had behind, and give the rest of their lives over to living with him, learning from him, and becoming his apprentices. They gave their total commitment to Jesus up front, they were ‘all in’ from the very beginning. And it was from this posture of complete trust and total commitment that these ordinary people started to become disciples who would become like Jesus and go on to change the world as they told others about him.

Soon after Jesus’ public ministry began, we read that ‘when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them …’ (Matthew 5:1-2). Jesus often drew crowds. People have always been interested in Jesus. Some people gathered to see what he would do, some people gathered to see what they could get. But Matthew makes it clear that there were two distinct groups: ‘the crowds’ – those who were curious admirers of Jesus, and ‘the disciples’ – those who were committed followers. Jesus’ call to every one of us is still to leave the crowd and be true disciples.

The Salvation Army’s Vision Statement in the United Kingdom and Ireland is ‘Fullness of life for all with Jesus’. It comes directly from the words of Jesus himself: ‘The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full’ (John 10:10). The good news is that fullness of life with Jesus is fully available to all; but it comes on the other side of complete surrender and obedience to him. That’s why Jesus said: ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.’ (Matthew 16:24-25)

**Chicken or pig?**

Let’s get back to chickens!

It was the farmer’s birthday, and the animals got together to discuss what they might be able to give the farmer as a gift. Several ideas were discussed, but then the chicken spoke up with what seemed to be an excellent plan. ‘I’ve got it,’ said the chicken to the pig. ‘How about we provide the farmer with breakfast for his birthday: bacon and eggs?’ To which the pig responded, ‘That’s easy for you to say; for you it would just be a gift, but for me it would be a total sacrifice!’

Are you more like the chicken or the pig? Are you providing *gifts* for Jesus out of your abundance, or is your life fully given over to him as a sacrifice?

The central theme for today, Candidates Sunday, is taken from Paul’s words to the church in Rome, and I want to use this as a challenge for each of us:

‘Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.’ (Romans 12:1-2)

Jesus gave his life on the cross to pay the price for your sins and mine, in order that we can be forgiven, set free, and live in relationship with God; but a response of faith is required from each of us.

Our ‘true and proper’ response to the one who gave everything *for* us, is that we would return everything *to* him – that our whole lives would be offered to him, for his service in whatever way he calls us. He might be calling some of you to be officers, some to be territorial envoys, some to be local leaders, and some to live fully for him exactly where you are. The most important call you can have is the one that God has issued to you!

The pattern of the world says ‘live for yourself’, ‘do what feels right’, ‘go with the crowd’, ‘fit in’. The call of Christ is ‘follow me’. Do not conform to the world’s calling, but be transformed as you trust Jesus and live in obedience to him.

So, to use *The Message* paraphrase:

‘So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life – your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life – and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognise what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.’ (Romans 12:1-2 *MSG*).

**Don’t be a chicken!**

* Stop pecking grain when you should be soaring.
* Leave the crowd and become a disciple.
* Give a sacrifice, not just a gift!

**Optional ending**

I am part of the fellowship of the unashamed.
I have Holy Spirit power. The die has been cast. I’ve stepped over the line.
The decision has been made. I’m a disciple of Jesus.

I won’t look back, let up, slow down, back away, or be still.
My past is redeemed, my present makes sense, and my future is secure.

I am finished with low living, sight walking, small planning, smooth knees, colourless dreams, tame visions, mundane talking, cheap giving, and dwarfed goals!

I no longer need pre-eminence, prosperity, position, promotion, plaudits, or popularity. I don’t have to be right, first, tops, recognised, praised, regarded or rewarded. I now live by faith, lean on his presence, love with patience, uplifted by prayer, and labour with power.

My pace is set, my gait is fast, my goal is Heaven, my road is narrow, my way is rough, my companions are few, but my guide is reliable, my mission is clear. I cannot be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, diluted, or delayed.

I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of the adversary, negotiate at the table of the enemy, ponder at the pool of popularity, or meander in the maze of mediocrity.

I won’t give up, shut up, or let up, until I’ve stayed up, stored up, prayed up, paid up, and preached up for the cause of Christ.

I am a disciple of Jesus. I must go ’till he comes, give ’till I drop, preach ’till all know, and work ’till he stops me.

And when he comes to get his own, he’ll have no problem recognising me. Because my colours will be clear.

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