

There is an old cross, and there is a new cross. Which one are you carrying?

So Jesus says that anyone that wants to be his disciple, has to carry their cross!
But which cross was he talking about. Because it seems to me that in every generation, there is an old cross and a new. For many centuries, the Cross has been so enmeshed in western culture, that it starts to seem normal, unremarkable. We see a cross without batting an eye lid. But the old cross would unnerve you, it would send a shiver down your spine, you could only turn your eyes away from it in fear, or disgust, or shame.

The new cross is one that is reasonable, it leaves precious parts of your life intact
The new cross does not make any demand of you that is inconsistent with your hopes and dreams,
The new cross does not interfere with everyday life, or embarrass you socially, or interfere with you financially.
The new cross is reasonable.

The old cross is utterly unreasonable.
The old cross kills you, every part of you subjected to death.
The old cross ends life as you know it, there is no part of you beyond its reach.
The old cross is unforgiving, excruciating, tragic.
The old cross is utterly unreasonable.

Jesus told us to carry our cross every day. I wonder, which of the two we carry?

The new cross buttresses family values, cocoons the nice Christian family in its tidy middle class box.
The new cross upholds our western values, turns a blind eye to those with no access to the western nuclear family and its happiness and its values.
The new cross is the icing on the cake of our happy lives.

The old cross causes us to despise our inherited family-values, to discard idealised family images in favour of real people.
The old cross extends its deathly grip through all of our values and ethics and assumptions and relationships.
The old cross ends our quest for the happy life portrayed by a dysfunctional society.

Jesus told us to carry our cross every day. I wonder which of the two we carry?

The new cross presents a relevant, upbeat Christianity. It shows us that Christianity will give us the life we always wanted.
The new cross will not create unnecessary demands for us, or ask too much of us.
The new cross will make sense, to us and to others. It will offer a sensible

approach to dealing with the stresses and strains of modern life.

The old cross casts the shadow of death over every avenue of our life, and steals from us the life we always wanted.

The old cross will demand us, every bit of us, it will bring us more pain that we can bear, more suffering that we can endure, more hardship than we can tolerate. The old cross hurts, it is bitter and cold and horrific and senseless.

Jesus told us to carry our cross every day. I wonder which of the two we carry?

The new cross is relevant and laid back and natural. It strikes a cord with us. The old cross is incomprehensible, intensive and stark, and completely unnatural. *Jesus told us to carry our cross every day. I wonder which of the two we carry?*

The new cross leaves all of our idolatries neatly intact. We can carry on as individualists: we can carry on thinking that our nuclear family is our real family. But Jesus had said, "whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even life itself, cannot be my disciple."

The new cross does not require us to be hampered by proper relationships by anyone outside our happy family in our middle class box.

Jesus said that if we are to be his disciples, we have to consider whether in fact we are willing to carry our cross. It means that before we begin our journey of discipleship, that we will consider just how much it will cost us, like a man building a house or a king commanding an army. The new cross makes no such demands. The new cross can postpone cost indefinitely, buy now – pay later. The new cross is culturally sensitive. It is appealing and attractive. It leaves frightening demands on the back burner until we feel ready. As if we will ever feel ready for crucifixion!

The new cross cannot spell the end of the idolatries that dehumanise us and others. You can have your cake and eat it, share all the materialistic dreams that are the rest of the world's nightmares, and still be a respected Christian.

The new cross allows us to keep our possessions, allows us a lifestyle that treasures possessions.

The old cross demands that we give them up – they lose their attraction and we disinvest.

The new cross is reasonable.

The old cross is uncompromising

The new cross spurns a worship that is everything that appeals to us. Great music, according to our taste. Under the new cross, worship is very concerned with the particular music, the particular words, and its worshippers will get very

hung up over worship styles and whether they like them or not. Under the new cross, worshippers engage with the Christ who does not put on a show for us, but who calls us to follow him – and he is on his way to die.

The new cross would win over the crowds that shout 'crucify him'
The old cross remains silent.
The new cross provides Jesus with a celebrity makeover
The old cross puts Jesus to a horrible, agonising, humiliating death.

But the new cross is losing its power all the time. Film and TV writers know how pointless it is. Those who write produce films about vampires, now tell us that using a cross to defeat a vampire is just a myth. Then they continue telling us a story about vampires! It is not their fault. The power of the new cross IS just a myth.

If the cross around your neck is a new cross, it's your free ticket to heaven
If the cross around your neck is an old cross, then you are wearing a first century electric chair.
If that is the new cross, then this is a time of glorious worship, and encouragement, and peace.
If that is the old cross, then this is an execution chamber and we are the spectators. And the God we worship is a crucified God, and we watched him die and we played our part in that.

But the old cross leads to a new life
The new cross leaves us with the same old life.

The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead, fills the lives of those who take up the old cross. Only the old cross leads us to this life of discipleship. You cannot have resurrection without death, and the new cross shies away from death.

But the old cross leads to a new life. That is why we believe in baptism – that we undergo a baptism of fire – where all that we are and all that we have is dead, buried below the watery grave. And the new life we now live, is no longer our own. We now belong to someone else – our passionately held politics, our soundest beliefs, our favourite sins, our unquestioned habits – all fall under the shadow of the old cross. The new cross never threatened them. The old cross brings liberty because it brings death to every great achievement as well as fine mess we have got ourselves into.

The resurrection vindicates the old cross. And it is the resurrection that truly makes Jesus attractive, the resurrection that brings true joy, the resurrection that establishes real peace. The new cross is simply a short cut to those things. The old cross is the path that Jesus has called us to tread.

Those who carried the old cross had said goodbye to their friends. They carried the cross-piece of the execution stake along the via delorosa, the Jerusalem street where they would be mocked at and jeered at and laughed at and spat at.

The new cross will make no demands of you today – it simply referred to your conversion, and to Jesus dying for you. The old cross draws you into the death and resurrection of Jesus today. That is why the Old Cross is scribed through the heart of your life, it is written in your dna – the Old Cross has its effect upon you today and every day.

Those who carry the old cross, can meaningfully call, “Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me - but then there is the awkward line: break me, melt me, mould me, fill me.” I know Christians who refuse to sing that whole line. They don’t like the bit about ‘break me’ – why do I want that – Christianity is not all about doom and gloom and crisis and brokenness. Well, that’s true – but neither is it all about victory, triumph, glory! All of those things are part of the Christian life, but without the cross, without the brokenness, all that victory and triumph and glory is distorted into something that looks like Christianity, but is more likely to be demonic. The old cross breaks us, the new cross leaves us neatly intact.

Unfortunately, and confusingly, the new cross shares all the language of the old. The new cross can talk of sacrifice, of pain, of suffering. The new cross can move us to tears, can make us feel broken, can convince us we have been remade, renewed. But sentimental experiences are simply part of the package of a happy life! We can be moved to tears without being moved to action, we can feel broken without our lifestyle being under any threat whatsoever, we can think ourselves renewed and remade if we buy a new wardrobe, or car, or gadget. Compliant with the dictates of the world that shapes our lifestyle.

So those who carry the new cross simply adhere to the lifestyle that the modern world demands of us. And that world demands a socially acceptable, privatized version of Christianity – one that does not challenge the self-centred lifestyle of the modern west. And in compliance, the new cross produces Diplomats:

The new cross produces diplomats; The old cross produces prophets. The Old cross produces people with a voice whose origin does not lie in the conventions of the world as we know it. The prophetic voice of the church has its origin in the experience of Grace, that infuses our community with a life from beyond itself. Don’t fool yourself into thinking that this is cheap, or comes without cost or sacrifice or disruption or discomfort. A prophetic voice comes from the outside, never from within.

And if we are the community gathered under the old cross – then we are the

community that truly has been granted a prophetic voice. A voice with which we may comfort and challenge one another; a voice with which we may comfort and challenge the world. A voice that only issues from the disciple who is carrying a cross.

There is a new cross, and there is an old! Which kind of cross are you carrying?