

*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

‘Everyone wants a revolution but no one wants to do the dishes.’

While it may not be original to them, this quotation is associated with Shane Claiborne and The Simple Way, an intentional Christian community in an economically deprived area of north Philadelphia. New monastic communities like The Simple Way, have at their core values very similar to traditional Christian monastic communities—commitment, stability and accountability to the community. Life is structured around a regular routine of work, prayer and gathering for worship. Traditional monasticism has bequeathed to the church a treasure trove of spiritual writings and edifying practices. New monastic communities have given us current, contextualised applications of these timeless practices and innovative examples of faith put into action. So how do you build a movement that impacts the world? We tend to look to the obvious, visionary leader, the inspirational figure, the revolutionary. But spare a thought for the small things, the unnoticed actions, the day-by-day that eventually makes up a lifetime of commitment.

‘Everyone wants a revolution but no one wants to do the dishes.’ So this morning, I speak to you about doing the dishes.

The writings of St Paul can be relied upon, time and again, to bring us down to the brass tacks of living out the Christian faith and that is the case in this morning's reading from Romans. We might remind ourselves of the lead-in to this morning's list of ethical exhortations. Think back to last week's passage from this letter about the impact of receiving new life in Christ. The response to God is to present ourselves as living sacrifices and to experience the renewing of our minds so that we rightly align ourselves with God's kingdom. This is the backdrop for Paul's list of instructions; they are the fruit of the life handed over

to God, the result of the 'self' offered as a living sacrifice. If we wanted to make a shorthand way of referring to this group of instructions I'd suggest we call it 'doing the dishes'. These are the unglamorous, possibly unnoticed and unappreciated, but essential relational habits of a Christian life.

Love is at the top of the list: let your love be genuine; and love one another with mutual affection. Love isn't a distant abstract notion. We know from elsewhere in Paul's writing that love is something direct and personal and finds its source in Christ—who loved each one of us and gave himself up for each one of us.

Or how's this for relationship advice: Outdo one another in showing honour. Or vs 16: live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. In our culture we tend to be obsessed with celebrities and following trends, but according to Paul the pathway to expressing Christ-like love lies elsewhere, in more humble circumstances. Paul has more advice regarding humility: Do not claim to be wiser than you are. Ouch! Admitting we don't have all the answers, that can be a challenge especially if we are in professional settings that prioritise constant, self-confident performance. How about 'bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them' and 'never avenge yourselves'. That is certainly an emotionally and relationally vulnerable place to be, to choose not to fire back when we are maligned or personally attacked. The Christians in Rome, to whom Paul was writing, probably faced very real persecution and social pressure for opting out of the wider civic-religious norms that involved worship of multiple deities. So verse 12, to 'be patient in suffering', was probably immediately applicable advice. Paul lays on yet another layer of relational advice: 'If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.' Another person's bad or unacceptable behaviour doesn't justify an ungracious or unloving response on the part of the Christian believer. No room for road rage here!

There are also instructions regarding caring and empathy: rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. That is, really be present with people in both joy and suffering. No holding on to private jealousies over another's good fortune; no harbouring secret satisfaction or a thinly veiled 'I told you this would happen' when something has resulted in tears.

In practical terms, Paul writes: 'contribute to the needs of the saints'. That applies to those within the church community. And equally he writes, 'extend hospitality to strangers' which if you think about it, is quite a large category of people. We might each of us take this instruction to heart and consider for ourselves, in what way do we show hospitality to strangers, to the people who aren't our immediate family and friends.

The passage wraps up with this beautiful little sound bite: 'Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good,' drawing together this laundry list of maxims and exhortations, that all flow from Paul's earlier statement about offering our bodies as living sacrifices and being transformed by the renewing of our minds so that we may discern the will of God. It calls for a great deal of humility, a lifestyle characterised by contented patience and perseverance, not flashy, not attention-seeking, but committed and accountable, day-by-day, to overcoming evil with good. This is the person who is ready to do the dishes.

You may point out that, surely, we could name any number of 'revolutionaries' in the Christian tradition: apostles, martyrs, great teachers, and social reformers. Yet I maintain that the foundation of the impactful Christian life is not the revolutionary-ness of the character, it's the faithfulness in doing the dishes, in the unseen and often un-fun parts of life. The truth is that we already have a great revolutionary to follow; we have Jesus. His ministry became high profile but never in a self-aggrandizing way. As he had to keep reminding

his disciples, things were moving in the direction of suffering and self-sacrifice. In this morning's gospel reading there is one such reminder. Peter, as we recall from last week, has made a foundational statement of faith: Jesus is the anointed one, the Son of the living God. He later tries to *correct* Jesus when he keeps going on about a future of suffering and death in Jerusalem. Peter envisaged this whole Messiah thing going in a very different direction. So Jesus had to offer some correction of his own. There needed to be a reorientation from Peter's human mindset to a divine perspective. Peter needed a renewing of his mind, in order to discern the will of God.

In verse 24 Jesus says to his disciples: 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.' He says that to us today as well. In prayer, with open hearts, we come to Jesus, day-by-day, and ask for guidance in how to take up our cross. This is an extreme statement of allegiance to the way of Jesus and not to the ways of the world. For some of our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world, to maintain their allegiance to Christ may very well mean imprisonment or death. For many of us, it may be more a matter of the day-by-day renewing of the mind and dying to self: being loving, hopeful, patient, persevering, caring, humble, forgiving, overcoming evil with good.

What does that look like in your life? How is that outward looking, service-oriented faith expressed in your home or work or community? I don't suggest that it is identical for everyone. If we try to take up someone else's cross, we're likely to end up merely exhausted and resentful. Jesus calls us to take up our own cross. What is the particular way you live this in your situation?

Persevering and unrelenting, an army of faithful and Spirit-empowered dishwashers, daily overcoming evil with good, add up to one serious revolution.