Yesterday morning the phone rang at six o’clock. Feeling very dazed, I reached out from bed and saw ‘BBC C&W’ on the display. It’s a good job they hadn’t used their customary ‘No Caller ID’ or it probably wouldn’t have been answered. John, really sorry to disturb you – Siobhan here from BBC C&W. Our speaker for the morning show is ill, and has pulled out, and we thought ‘who can we ask, who might be up and around on a Saturday morning...’. By 7.00 I was in the studio leafing through newspapers to find something to talk about – gay bishops, Calais, 999 calls because of the wrong sort of lemon tea bag in a restaurant, cannibal spiders ... and Poldark, just because one of my daughters is about to start a costume job on the new series.

All part of the territory, and part of building relationships with the local community, and helping out some people who have become friends. But if I’d thought ahead, would I have done it? Maybe, I’m not sure. But, as I say, it goes with the territory, and it’s great that they feel able to call on me in that way – to speak on behalf of the church, with the local community.

Here in the Cathedral we are called to a public role in the midst of the city, and the world – like all followers of Jesus, I believe we are called to involve ourselves in public life and public debate, not to hide ourselves away. We are called, quite simply, to be the Body of Christ – his flesh and bones, his words, his prayers – where he has called us, and where he has sent us. We should expect that that will involve sacrifice, and considerably more than the bleary eyes of having been woken early to go on the radio.

This week’s news has included stories of two disciples – Mother Teresa, and Bishop Nick, the Bishop of Grantham ... held up to public scrutiny, opposed by some, vilified by others. But they lived or are living their lives as disciples of Jesus – the only true way to live!

This morning’s readings both challenge us to make ourselves wholly to God. To be used as he chooses. To commit everything. The passage from the prophet Jeremiah of the potter’s house is hugely appealing – images, perhaps, of Patrick Swayze and Demi Moore in Ghost, if you are of my sort of generation. It’s so lovely to imagine ourselves as clay in God’s hands, being moulded to his purposes. Except that the passage is actually one of judgement: the purpose for which God had formed his people was being frustrated by their disobedience in matters of faith and life. They were neither serving God nor putting their trust in him – and so, Jeremiah warns them, they will be thrown back on the wheel to be completely re-made, like a pot which has gone askew.

Why would anyone resist living the life God has chosen them for, made them for? Do you remember the title of Malcolm Muggeridge’s biography of Mother Teresa? “Something beautiful for God”. I’m sure those who know them would say the same of the relationship between Bishop Nick and his partner, lived out within the House of Bishops guidelines. To live the life God chooses for us is the best, and the most beautiful way to live.

What is the purpose for which God formed you? What part has God chosen for you to play? Are you willing even to ask the question, let alone be ready to live it out with obedience? The question is put to all of us, each one – both individually and a whole body. How are you called to follow Jesus in your home and family, in your place of work, in your public role, if you have one? How are we called to follow Jesus in 2016 in the Cathedral: and what are the consequences and costs of obedience ... what are the consequences and costs of going our own way? Obedience may lead us through both beauty and brokenness. But going our own way, however briefly glorious, ultimately will only be a cul de sac, a dead end. A forgotten story rather than one that endures.

The story of the people of Israel in the time of Jeremiah is like that – just like a pot which has become skewed on the wheel – they were torn down and, ultimately, reformed ... but it was a bitter and painful process before the joy of the new life which God eventually brought, though not in their generation. The truth is that God’s ways are right not
just for God – but for us ... and the consequences of serving ourselves is that we let not just God down, but ourselves too. However, serving God can seem really challenging. Almost impossible.

God calls us to put others first. We are so used to hearing this that it can seem almost clichéd. But if we look at our lives, where is the evidence that this is what we are doing? And why does it make sense? It only makes sense, in a Darwinian sense if you like, if by putting others first we will thereby ultimately benefit. Do we trust that our lives are more secure as part of a greater whole which is under the care and direction of God, than if we are taking responsibility for them selves, making sure that I put me first – making sure that I am the object of my own future, rather than somehow hoping that in the end my future is more secure in hand with others? It’s called the Kingdom – perhaps most beautifully described in RS Thomas’ poem of the same name, which I’ve quoted before – somewhere which is close but also a long way, and to which admission is free, but which costs us all our desires.

To set out to follow Jesus is not something to do on a whim. When he teaches about the cost of being a disciple, he is talking to crowds – large numbers of people who have come flocking to him, wanting to be part of the latest thing. “Are you really up for this?” is the heart of his question to them. Don’t set out on the journey if you aren’t really committed to following it through. (To use a foolish example, to say that I willingly accept the relatively public role as Dean of this Cathedral but then turn over in bed and refuse to answer a call from the local radio station at the relatively modest hour of six in the morning.) Stop for a moment, and count the cost of being part of this movement.

I was just a little bit interested in whether there was a parallel here to be drawn with the debate – perhaps on either side – of the referendum. Had those on either side really honestly counted the cost of voting in, or out: this decision was to shape theirs and their children’s future for generations to come. It was not just a decision of a moment.

Discipleship means discipleship: unlike ‘Brexit’, it does actually have a meaning. It means to follow Jesus: to go where he goes, to look on the world with his eyes, to hold the world with his hands, to love the world with his heart ... and to give our lives, with his, for the sake of others. To be a disciple is to follow, with discipline, with courage and obedience, and discernment.

So, Jesus says, you need to decide. To follow me will cost you everything. In our own lives, too, we will be familiar with the challenge of looking at our resources to see what we have got, and whether we can embark on a particular project – or perhaps just find the money to keep going at all. Being a disciple of Jesus is the greatest project of all – but we’re not alone!

The greatest project we can be part of is the project of building our own part of the Kingdom of God. When we sit down and pray and look at our resources – will we be able to follow through the particular task that God has set us? The good news is that Jesus will never call us – together as a Cathedral, or individually – to commit to something we can’t do. The harder news is that just as he knows everything we have to offer, all the resources which we can call on, even the ones hidden away for a rainy day – and I’m not just talking financial resources, but the things we are scared to bring out into the light, the things which when we have used them leave us saying’ I didn’t believe I could do that – I didn’t believe I had it in me!’ – that is exactly what he says it will cost to be his disciple. It will call on everything we have, and everything we are ... but the excitement is that means nothing is wasted!

So what should we do? Each of us has a role to play. When I worked as a Diocesan Director of Ordinands, I used the RIO test, rather appropriate in the wake of the Olympics and perhaps even more so as the Paralympics get under way. I used the triple question when someone came to test a vocation to ordained ministry – is your vocation realistic (R), informed (I), and obedient (O). Pause, Pray, Plan – and then find someone to talk to about it.

God is at work making and remaking the world. What part do we have to play as this Cathedral – and what part do you have to play in that? (or wherever you are rooted in your own context, if you are visiting today?)

Is your greatest desire to follow Jesus, the King of Kings, as he builds his Kingdom in your life and in the world? It’s not a decision to make lightly, but neither is it a decision you will ever regret. Your commitment to him is the tiniest part of a relationship in which his commitment to you – to us – captures all our smallest offerings and makes of them something beautiful.

As St. Paul writes in Ephesians: Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.