

The grandest of all designs

Julian Smith *reflects on* Luke 14:25-33

Our TV screens are full of programmes about buying, selling, renovating or building houses. One long-running favourite begins by asking would-be builders or renovators how long they plan for the work to last and how big their budget is. At the end of the programme, when we've sat through disasters, overruns of time and money, and the worst weather ever, we learn how much the work actually cost. Often the difference between the initial budget and the final spend is huge.

In today's Gospel, Jesus speaks of the cost of discipleship. One of the examples he gives is of building a tower when, he says, you must ensure that you have enough money to complete the tower before you begin work. "Don't start what you can't finish," is the advice in essence.

The over-spenders on our TV screens may have ignored Jesus' advice about realistic costing, but their commitment is undeniable. The programme works because people are deeply committed to their projects – whether it is breathing new life into a neglected house, or blending a modern eco-house into stunning scenery. They will beg, borrow, scrimp and save because they will not walk away from a project which is close to their hearts.

Jesus reminds us that discipleship can cost us everything – family, friends and even life itself. But following Jesus is the grandest of designs, and requires our total commitment. 🙏

The problem of evil *Part I – who is the snake?*

by Jane Williams

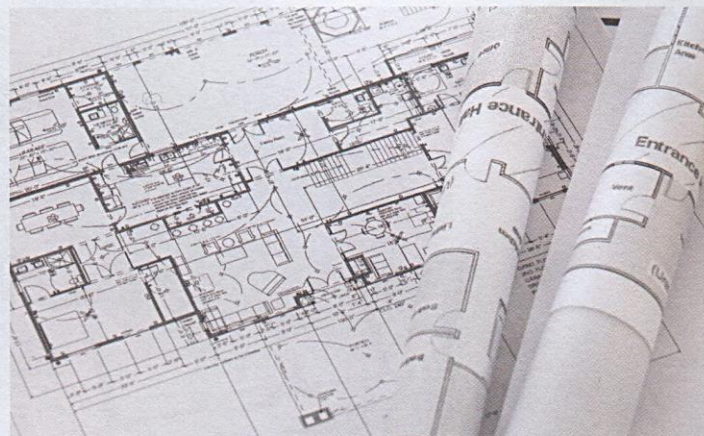
A four-part series about evil by theologian and writer Dr Jane Williams.

Christians say there is only one God, that God is wholly good, that God is not forced to do anything, and that everything God makes is good. That's why evil is such a conundrum.

Genesis does not tell us where the crafty snake comes from; nor, unambiguously, that the snake is evil. It is just devious. If Adam and Eve had played their part properly,

exercising the dominion that God gave them, they would not have been taken in by this creature. So Genesis leaves us with this psychologically truthful situation – evil both is and is not our fault. The snake tempts us, but we ought to know better than to listen.

But of course evil is not just an intellectual problem. It is painful and damaging beyond bearing. Genesis goes on to recount how God curtails and overcomes the damage done to the world, through choosing people who are helped to remember the true nature of God, and from whom will come God's Messiah. 🙏



Lord Jesus, You call us to follow you but the path of discipleship is hard. Give me the courage to walk that path each day and the willingness to give up everything for the sake of your kingdom. Amen.

The parts of a church *Part V – rearranging the furniture*

by Heather Cooke

Originally, altars were portable, to allow people to gather round, echoing both the Last Supper and the communal meals in people's homes that predated formal communion services. Moveable altars also evoke the temporary altars erected as the nomadic Hebrews pitched their tents in new places, always wanting to give thanks to God.

For centuries the altar was hidden behind chancel screens

or fixed to the wall and the priest had his (always, then, "his") back to the congregation. In modern church buildings communion tables and other furniture can often be moved to allow for other activities.

We've only scratched the surface of the fascinating history of church buildings, but it merits further study. Do you know the story of yours? Do you know someone who does? Perhaps you'll research it yourself, and play your part in preserving our heritage, both architectural and spiritual. 🙏

“Few prodigals can break out unaided, because worldliness, by definition, is approved of by the world... It often takes the shock of goodness to break the trap.”

Weekday Living Word, Redemptorist Publications, March 2021