Some educators have championed “errorless learning," advising teachers (and students) to create study conditions that do not permit errors. The idea is that if students make errors, they will learn the errors and be prevented (or slowed) in learning the correct information. But research completed at UCLA recently contests this notion; they found, learning becomes better if conditions are arranged so that students make errors. They claim people remember things better, longer, if they are given very challenging tests on the material, tests at which they are bound to fail. In a series of experiments, they showed that if students make an unsuccessful attempt to retrieve information before receiving an answer, they remember the information better than in a control condition in which they simply study the information. Trying and failing to retrieve the answer is actually helpful to learning. It’s an idea that has obvious applications for education, but could be useful for anyone who is trying to learn new material of any kind.

This makes me think of the relationship between Jesus and his disciples. I get the impression that the disciples were a roughly drawn group of people who kept trying and failing. They never quite got it right, but they kept on trying.

In last week’s Gospel passage, Peter identified Jesus as the Son of God and Jesus called Peter his rock on whom he would build the church. Peter is on the right track. Today in the Gospel reading Jesus calls Peter “Satan”. Poor old Peter- you couldn’t blame him for having an identity crisis at this point!

The tension lies in Peter’s understanding of what being the Messiah means. He may have been brought up on the idea of a sort of warrior Messiah - someone who would liberate Israel by his qualities of leadership through great acts of strength and honour. The problem with Peter’s expectation is that whilst it’s not unreasonable, it doesn’t change anything. Rome is there in force and by violence. If Jesus as a warrior-king uses greater force and violence to drive them out it’s just a matter of time until someone with even more force or violence takes over yet again. Who’s in charge may change, but wheel of force and violence keeps revolving.

Jesus knows this. He knows that by introducing a different logic – forgiveness, mercy, and love rather than retribution, violence, and hate – he is challenging the powers that be. Moreover, he knows that the wheel of force and violence will not tolerate his obstruction but run him over. And this Peter just couldn’t imagine.

Peter’s words echo the empty promises offered by Satan in the desert. Hence the response which seem harsh: “get behind me, Satan”. Last week, Peter was thinking along the lines that Jesus was leading him; this week, he has reverted to more human thinking.

You don’t get it right all the time, even when you’re a disciple, even when the church is going to be built on you; in fact, *especially* when the church is going to be built on you. We come to church as a group of people who know we don’t get it right – but we endeavour and we try. That’s hard and it means at some level we suffer. Suffering is sometimes about feeling pain but it is also about losing face, about being criticised and misunderstood and disliked.

Jesus makes the point: not only is He destined to suffer but those who follow Him are going to suffer too. The true followers of Jesus will, like Him, have to shoulder the burdens of suffering and death.

They could, like Him, avoid it by conforming to the things that the world values - but, in the end, that means losing their integrity - the person they were created to be.

Miles Stanford, who writes on the theme of discipleship, says that we will do anything to "bypass the death sentence" of self (in his book *Principles of Spiritual Growth*).  We are very adept at trying to convince God that "self-improvement" rather than self-death is the way to go.  We bargain with God, "Just leave my life intact, and I'll follow you."

Martin Luther, in his Heidelberg Disputations, also addressed this call to suffering:  "He who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering.  Therefore, he prefers works to suffering, glory to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly, and in general, good to evil.  These are the people whom the apostle calls 'enemies of the cross of Christ,' for they hate the cross and suffering, and love works and the glory of works."

Can we criticise anyone for seeking glory rather than death? Non-one longs for death. But we do know that suffering and death is part of all our journeys, if we get everything right on the way, we still won’t avoid suffering and death.

It feels like we are living in a time when to be popular is glorified, to be seen to be right is above everything else. It’s not the way Jesus presents the Gospel. Instead he compels his disciples to throw off the temptation to avoid failure, to be right and to be successful every time, and follow Him to the way of the cross, which will mean going wrong occasionally but always learning as you go.

As Peter learns, it’s a journey that will take some of imagination.