

Daily Discipleship

Second Sunday in Lent (B) – Mark 8:31-38

The Path of Discipleship: *Beyond Oneself*

Focus Question: *What does it mean to take up your cross and follow Jesus?*

word of life

If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. Mark 8:34 (NRSV)

Read Mark 8:31-38

It is important to keep this passage in its context. Thus, take a moment to read the previous verses found in Mark 8:27-30. Jesus asks the disciples what people are saying about him. Then Jesus directly asks the disciples, “But who do you say that I am?” (Mark 8:29 NRSV) It is a shining moment for Peter because he answers correctly. He declares Jesus to be the Messiah. This is Peter’s great declaration of faith.

Immediately following this confession of faith, Jesus begins to talk about his pending death and resurrection. It is as if the disciples are mature enough in faith to hear this critical development unfolding in the coming weeks. But Peter is not ready for such news. Peter imagines something different for the future of Jesus. No doubt Peter has good intentions as he tries to persuade Jesus that he does not have to die. Jesus speaks sternly to Peter. In just a few verses, Peter goes from star student to being called “Satan.”

1. *Why would the news of the death of Jesus have been difficult for Peter to hear?*
2. *Why was Jesus so tough on Peter?*

Jesus turns to the crowd and sets a standard for following him. It is going to take commitment and sacrifice. “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” (Mark 8:34 NRSV) These are not popular words. Carrying a cross in the first century world of Palestine would have meant a death sentence. This image of a cross would have been most perplexing for the listeners. What would a cross have to do with following Jesus? It is important to keep in mind that Jesus is predicting his death, so his audience would not have the crucifixion as a frame of reference.

3. *What might have been the response of the crowd?*
4. *How do you imagine Peter and the disciples responding to these words?*

In reality, who wants to deny themselves? Who wants to sacrifice? This is not a positive marketing strategy. Yet the way of Jesus is not an easy path. Jesus is calling followers to not think of themselves or human things. Instead, Jesus requests followers to set their mind on divine things.

Following Christ is not for those who are undecided or lukewarm. Jesus is calling for a clear commitment. Jesus warns followers not to be ashamed of him. He turns things upside down. Those who cling to their life and possessions will certainly lose it. Those who lose their life will gain it.

5. *What is Jesus trying to say in this passage?*
6. *What are other ways of explaining the message of Jesus in this passage?*

word among us

It is only the second week in the season of Lent, but already the message from Jesus is getting intense. Jesus is describing the demands of discipleship. It is not an easy path, but one filled with sacrifice, suffering and service.

1. *Do you believe more people would follow Jesus if he would make it easier? Why?*
2. *What is lost if it becomes too easy to follow Jesus?*

We know Jesus is not just preaching idle words. Jesus is going to pick up a cross and die. Jesus means what he says. The way of the cross is not a theory. This is a radical calling, placing us against a society that encourages serving ourselves first.

3. *How does the teaching of Jesus conflict with some aspects of modern society?*

Jesus offers a radically different approach. With bold words, Jesus calls for a new humanity, born as people follow the ways of Christ and deny themselves. It is clear the path of discipleship is not going to be on flat ground and protected by shade. Instead, the path includes sacrifice and suffering.

4. *This session is called "Beyond Oneself." What does that phrase mean as it relates to the words of Jesus?*

Consider your own life. Reflect how your understanding about being a disciple of Jesus has changed over the years.

5. *What is the hardest thing about following Christ?*
6. *What keeps you from being complacent and relaxed about this radical call?*

In Dietrich Bonhoeffer's classic book *The Cost of Discipleship*, he challenges the reader, "The cross is laid on every Christian.... As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death – we give over our lives to death. Thus it begins; the cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ." Bonhoeffer continually warns followers of Jesus to not rely on a false understanding of a cheap grace given by God.

When we pick up our cross, automatically there is a shift as we open our hands and spirits to lift the cross. In order to make room to carry the cross, we put something else down, including hatred, anger, pride and other burdens.

7. *What are you being asked to put down in order to carry the cross?*

Prayer

Gracious God, expand my vision to see things from your perspective. Give me courage and strength to pick up a cross and follow you. Amen

Dig Deeper

Mark 15:21-32

last word

Draw a cross on a paper.
In each quadrant,
write something to let go
so you can follow Christ more fully.



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