

TAKE UP YOUR CROSS

Devotional for September 16, 2018 based upon Mark 8: 27-38

Jesus never calls upon anyone to do anything that He Himself would not do and/or has not done. What He asks us to face, He Himself has already faced. Jesus has the right to challenge us to take up a cross, because He Himself has already taken up His cross.

But all that goes against the grain. The world tells us that anything that bothers us or becomes difficult we should seek to avoid. Jesus said, "If any want to become My followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Me." What does it mean to "take up your cross"?

First, TAKING UP A CROSS IS ALWAYS VOLUNTARY. Jesus calls us, and Jesus challenges us, but taking up a cross and following Jesus is always voluntary. A bad medical diagnosis, a personal tragedy, or a severe accident may all be a heavy burden to bear. But they are not a cross that you have taken up for Jesus, because you did not volunteer for them.

Second, TAKING UP A CROSS IS AN ACT OF LOVE. An act of love that we freely choose. It is a price we pay out of love. For Jesus taking up His cross meant going to Calvary to die. He did it because He loves us so much that He could not do otherwise. Taking up a cross means taking the love of God and touching the lives of other people, even those who are very difficult to love. Taking up a cross means denying and sacrificing and paying the price regardless of the hardships that we must endure.

Third, TAKING UP A CROSS IS HARD. In fact, it is so hard that whenever the message of the cross is preached, some people will object. They will say, "You cannot be asking me to do that. That would be too hard."

Kind of like Peter in our Gospel lesson for this coming Sunday, when Jesus was talking about His impending death on the cross. Peter objected. "Lord, that is not the way it is supposed to happen." A few years later the apostle Paul called the cross "a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks." Not much has changed, has it?

The cross was a stumbling block to Jews because it was not what they were expecting. It was not what they wanted to hear. As an oppressed people they wanted their Christ, their Messiah, their Anointed One to deliver them. It is not what we want to hear either. All of Jesus' talking about taking up a cross bothers us. We lean back in our chair, wanting to take it easy, but we hear Him say, "Take up your cross and follow Me."

Today Jesus offers you a cross. Not a life of ease. Not a church that will always make you comfortable and happy. Not a guarantee of success on the job. Not a promise that everything will always go smoothly and exactly as you want for the rest of your life. Rather today Jesus offers you a cross. But along with a cross He offers you eternal life. For, as Jesus said, "Those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for My sake and for the sake of the Gospel, will save it."

Will you do what Jesus said and take up a cross?

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