

Daily Discipleship

Worship Reflections

The Weekend of September 12, 2021

Mark 8:27-38

Living in Christ: *Pick Up the Cross*

Focus Question: *How can I pick up the cross this week?*

Memory Verse: *“Take up your cross and follow me”*

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 8:27-38

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke all contain the story of the declaration of faith by Peter. The details of the story are quite similar. The disciples are heading to Caesarea Philippi. Jesus asks his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?”

1. *How else might the contemporaries of Jesus describe him?*
2. *What answer is Jesus seeking?*

The answers given by the disciples reflect the roots of the Old Testament. Some people think Jesus is John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets. Then Jesus asks the question directly of the disciples, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter becomes the star student. “You are the Messiah.” Good answer. This is a core confession of faith.

In response to Peter's answer, Jesus reveals his future suffering, rejection, death, and resurrection. He speaks openly to his disciples, but Peter takes him aside to convince him to walk another path. Jesus turns to Peter and rebukes him. The star student has sunk to the bottom in the class.

3. *Why would Peter try to alter the path of Jesus?*
4. *Why was Jesus so angry with Peter?*
5. *How is possible for a human to set his or her mind on divine things?*

Jesus then proclaims a central principle of his teaching and his life. "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." (Mark 8:34 NRSV)

Following Jesus is meant to be a life-changing transformation. In this passage, the class moves from the fundamentals to an unexpected depth of discipleship.

People who carry crosses tend to end up dying on the very cross they carry. Carrying a cross is not a path to glory and personal reward. Jesus expands his teaching. "For 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." (Mark 8:35 NRSV)

6. *What does it mean to carry one's cross?*
7. *What does Jesus mean when he says to lose one's life?*

Many will view the death of Jesus on the cross as shameful, as if Jesus has done something wrong. Jesus is an innocent man who takes the shame and guilt of all people to the cross with him and dies on their behalf. Those who are ashamed of the Messiah and deny Jesus will be denied by Jesus.

These are not idle words by Jesus. He is quite serious in his mission and his invitation to discipleship, but it is not an easy commitment.

8. *What are we to remember from this passage?*

word *among us*

Two college students walked into the university on the first day of fall semester and sat down beside each other in the classroom. The professor promptly began with an opening lecture. One of the students was enthralled with the presentation while the other dozed off to sleep. The second student had decided in the first three minutes of class that the professor was too difficult and decided to transfer out.

1. *How do you decide if a teacher is worth the effort and energy?*
2. *What do you advise if a student gets a difficult teacher?*

As children and youth, we were often assigned teachers throughout our education with little choice in the matter. But at some point, most of us learned to check out the teacher. Sometimes, students (and their parents) orchestrate and maneuver to get the best teachers. It's not always a pretty sight. Adult learners (such as college students) can be quite selective. This is especially true if the learner is paying hard-earned money for the education.

3. *How might difficult teachers be the best teachers?*
4. *Describe the teaching style of Jesus.*
5. *How difficult is it to understand the teaching of Jesus? Explain.*
6. *How difficult is it to follow Jesus? Explain.*

Jesus encourages his followers to do a background check on him as they consider becoming his student.

The process includes two important questions: “Who do *people* say that I am?” (Mark 8:27 NRSV) and “Who do *you* say that I am?” (Mark 8:29 NRSV)

Jesus is seeking committed followers – those willing to confess their faith in him. Yet, following Jesus is not for the faint-hearted. Followers of Jesus are invited to deny themselves and pick up their cross to follow. We cannot pick up the weight of a cross if our hands and arms are full of our own personal agendas.

7. *Give modern-day examples of what it means to carry a cross.*
8. *What makes this teaching so difficult?*
9. *How can you encourage one another to follow the cross of Christ?*

Prayer

Jesus, you call us to follow you and pick up our cross. What does that mean? What cross is before us this week to pick up? What if it is too heavy? Come, walk with us and show us the way. Amen.

Dig Deeper

Matthew 16:13-28

Luke 9:18-27

last word

Think of someone
who graciously
carries a cross
and offer words of encouragement.