

Cross
Mark 8:31-38

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the word of God this day. AMEN.

This sermon is pretty straight forward and you don't need much explanation in my sermon to understand it. One line seems to sum it all up. So here is the sermon for today – short and brief but right to the point – “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” Amen.....

.....

Don't look shocked that it can't get any clearer- “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” Amen.

.....

That's it, that's the entire message for today. To be Christians, to be good followers of Christ, we must deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow him. Simple..... Bear your cross and follow. Amen.

>>>>>>>.....

I mean really now, think about it, that is the core, central message to the entire Christian belief. To be in salvation is to completely die in the flesh, to die in sin, to die in this world so that we can rise in Christ, in forgiveness, into eternal life. To be God's people we are to die in ourselves and live in Christ, bearing the mission and the cross that he gives us to bear, following, going, doing what the mission is that has been given to us. To truly be God's people, to be Christ's disciples involves three easy steps, 1 Deny oneself. 2 Bear the Cross. 3 Follow! There is not anything else to say it is quite clear. Deny, Bear the cross, and Follow!

*****>>>>>>>.....

Are you waiting for some other words of comfort, of peace and warm fuzziness? Well its' not in this text. Christ didn't always comfort the people, Many times Christ challenges the people, provokes them, drives them to change. Christ has just rejected Peter, rebuked him as one full of Satan's ways because he is denying the truth of what the Son of Man is about to do.

Peter like every human being that has ever lived, has his own opinions. He knows what he wants in a Son of Man, an anointed one, a messiah. Peter just like many Jews had been waiting a long time for the chosen one to come and lead Israel in power and might. To overthrow their enemies and bring about a restoration of the Reign of King David. Peter knows without a doubt, without question this is where the Son of Man should be heading towards, not

to suffering, not to rejection, not to be the captive of the priests and the scribes. And definitely not to be handed over to death. That is not Peter's plan for the coming righteousness. He takes Jesus aside and rebukes him. Peter knows what is best, why won't Jesus just listen.

Would we, any of us be any different. We know what is best for our family, when our parents don't seem to understand or our children just don't seem to hear what we are saying – we know of course what they need if they would just hear us and do what we say. As church members I am sure you know what is needed to fix the state of the church today, each one of us has our opinion, just do this, play that, have this group and all will be well in the church. If people would just listen to us and do what we say, we know what is best for the economy, we know what is best for our businesses, we know what is best for schools, we know what is best for our homes, our cars, our clothes, our money, or at least we think we do know best – if others would just listen to us. Peter was denying the role of the Son of Man, would we have been any different.

We wouldn't have liked to hear that Jesus is going to die as much as Peter probably didn't like hearing that coming from the Lord's mouth. We just live on the other side of Easter and know what Jesus is about to do. But for Peter this was not in his plans at this point. It didn't make sense. He knew what the messiah had to do and dying was not a part of it. Peter had faith, Peter was the rock, Peter was one of his inner circle. Peter was one the leaders. Peter thought he knew what was best.

And yet Jesus turns and rebukes him, No comforting words, no warm fuzzys, but full straight in your face answer- “Get behind me Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.” Then Jesus follows this up by calling all the crowds and the disciples to hear his next words, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

Simple straight forward. So why don't we hear that message? Are we like Peter refusing to hear it. Are we stuck hearing only our own thoughts and our own opinions. It is tough to hear Jesus rebuking us, confronting us, commanding us to deny ourselves, to bear a cross. We don't take it literally that we have to lose our life to save it, we don't have to lose our life for the sake of Christ and for the sake of the Gospel – right? Jesus did, but that is not what he is asking us to do right? Okay that is what James, Andrew, John, Matthew, Nathaniel, Bartholomew and the rest even Peter but that can't be what God is asking us to do today right? To deny ourselves and put God first in everything we do.

That would be just too hard for us to do today. Of course back in Peter's day it was easier, he was only a fisherman, he didn't have the same obligations we have today. He didn't have family to worry about – wait actually the Bible tells us that he did. But he didn't have to

worry about his house, paying the mortgage or rent, but he did have a house that probably needed work just like many of our own homes. But we know for certain he didn't have to worry about his investment portfolio, 401K or savings accounts he didn't have one, I suppose all he had to worry about is where he was getting enough money for the next day, to buy food and clothing just to make it through. Perhaps Peter did in fact have it just as tough or even tougher for him back then compared to us today.

So why do we find it so hard to deny ourselves and follow Christ. To die in our old self and live in Christ's. Many people give of their time to teach Sunday school. Some give of their time to sing and lift us up God's praise in music. Some give of their time to repair, clean, tend the property. Some give of their resources and assets to support the ministry of the church. But how many of us have denied ourselves in the past month, denied ourselves or our family of something we wanted or someplace we wanted to be at, something we think we deserved, something we thought was best to do instead of doing the work of Christ. When do we really deny ourselves?

This is an easy text, straight forward, Christ isn't pulling any punches as he rebukes Peter, his right hand man, and commands the crowds to follow him by denying themselves and taking up their cross and following. It is straight forward, and yet we stumble over it and have difficulty in doing it.

We can make excuses, we could even try to rationalize it away. I am too young to do God's work, I am too old to do God's work. I am not smart enough to be doing God's work. I am too busy to do God's work. I don't have the right words to share the faith. But each excuse sounds almost silly as compared to what Christ has done for us already. Denied himself, suffered and offered his life for us so that we may have life.

This sermon message is pretty simple, This is rather a short sermon. If any want to become Christ followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow him. You just have to listen and hear what cross, what work, what ministry is Christ calling to you this day to pick up and follow. What witnessing of the word, sharing the love of God, forgiving as God has forgiven is Christ asking you to do this day. And then simple message is do it. If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." Just do it. Amen.

May the peace and Grace of God be with you this day and throughout the week to come.
AMEN.

Let us pray for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus, and for all people according to their needs.

Almighty God, you have sent Jesus Christ to overcome all hardships and all temptations, even satan and death itself. He overcame all these things to win for us a place in your eternal kingdom. Continue to bless us with that hope and assurance, so that all stumbling blocks may be removed from our journey of faith. Send your spirit of knowledge and guidance to strengthen us in our beliefs so that we can answer with boldness what we believe in you.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, Hear our Prayer..

O Heavenly Father, we ask that you bless us with the mind of Christ so that we may be his partners in welcoming others into your life of grace and forgiveness. In a world of violence and war, we need your blessing of peace. In a world filled with hatred and envy and guilt, we need your forgiveness. In a world filled with disasters both manmade and natural where so many are suffering we need you to tend to us and keep us. Lord Bless us this day with your Love, grace, forgiveness and peace.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, Hear our Prayer.

God, stretch out your saving hand to those who are sick. With your strong love, comfort the lonely, the oppressed, and all who suffer. Give courage to those facing surgery. Give healing to those who are afflicted. Give peace to those troubled both physically and mentally. Impart your Holy Comforter to be with them in their times of need. Especially we remember today our hospitalized, our homebound and all those we name now in our prayers to you....

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, hear our prayer.

Lord, we pray for this community of faithful; teach us to use the many gifts you have given us for the common mission of your Church. Be with our sister Church at St. Mark and throughout the conference. Take and use us as your witnesses, as your servants in this community and beyond to spread your word, to share your good news, to welcome the stranger and lift up those torn down by hatred and sin. Lift up your face and shine upon us and send us forth as your witnesses of that glory now and forever.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, hear our prayer.

Into your hands, O Lord we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.