

Scripture:

Mark 8: 27-38

“The way of the cross.”

“The way of the cross.” --- that’s the heading for the last part of our gospel reading today in many Bibles ---- “The way of the cross.”

What is the way of the cross?

What does it mean to embrace and live the way of the cross?

What does it mean when Jesus says ---- verse 34 today --- “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”?

What does it all actually mean --- the way of the cross --- to take up your cross?

Didn’t Jesus die once and for all finally ----- bearing our sins --- the cross --- -- our cross for us?

Why all this ---- “your cross” ---- talk?

Mark’s gospel reading today ---- similar to those from the last two weeks ---- is set in opposition --- and contrast.

There is this way --- and then there is that way.

One is right and true and faithful --- and the other --- well not so much.

Our reading today for example begins with different understandings of Messiah ---- and then moves to rolling this idea out a bit ---- how the Messiah will conclude His work --- His death and last days.

And it looks at how the understanding --- even among Jesus’ followers --- Peter specifically ---- is quite different from how it will actually happen.

And then our reading concludes with discussion about the way of the cross --  
- the way followers of Jesus are to live and understand their brief time here  
on earth --- what priorities they ought to focus on.

So there is this contrast ----- in the first few verses ---- 27-30 ---- it's about  
the true Messiah as opposed to the perceived Messiah.

And then in verses 31-33 ----- there is the contrast between how the Messiah  
will actually close out His last days ---- and how this flies in the face of how  
people anticipated this ----- suffering ---- rejection --- crucifixion ----- as  
opposed to conquering by power and might.

And then there is the final part of the gospel today ----- the way of the cross.

The contrast between the way of the cross ---- and the way of the world.

On the one hand this --- and then on the other that.

One is right and true and faithful --- and the other --- well not so much.

There are true perceptions of the Messiah --- and the way of the cross -----  
and then there are the misguided ones

This way ----- and then that way ----- contrast and opposition ---- is the  
structure and pattern of our gospel reading today --- and often the gospel in  
general.

The world one way --- the gospel another.

The church --- the body of and gathering of followers of Jesus Christ is  
called to a way of being that is counter cultural.

A way of being and doing and relating ---- that is very often in opposition to  
the world --- a stark contrast to conventional thinking.

The way of the world --- without the gospel:  
---- look out for number one ---- look out for yourself --- establish yourself  
as independent ---- the most important find your personal individual identity  
and self.

The way of Christ --- the way of the cross:

----take care of others --- lose yourself in the gospel find your identity in Him --- and by caring for others.

The way of the world:

----- life is short

---- you only live once.

The way of the cross:

----- eternal life --- endless opportunity to change and improve yourself.

The way of the world:

----- express yourself

--- be yourself

--- live however it is you want to live

--- be different from everyone else ----- be you.

The way of the cross:

----- nurture your soul

----- be like Jesus

---- try to live as Christ as would have you live.

The way of the cross ----- take up your cross ----- means dying to the way of the world --- and taking on a new --- gospel life.

The way of the cross is all about being broken up and torn open ---- sometimes even torn apart ---- and then being rebuilt --- resurrected.

It's about death to one way of living and being ---- and being reborn and growing into another.

The way of the cross very often includes going down the tubes.

Do people still use this phrase? --- "Going down the tubes."

Well the way of the gospel often means ---- going down the tubes of this world ----- and then rising up through the corridors of faith into a new depth of faith and relationship with Jesus Christ.

It's as paradoxical as the cross --- in death comes life through the cross ----- in going down we rise up in Christ.

The downward way up.

Very often the only way up in faith is first the great deep sometimes dark descent down --- down to the cross --- the crossroads where we meet Jesus Christ.

Death is truly only the way to Christ ----- death to old ways of being and thinking.

Death is truly the only way to the resurrection ---- there is no Easter without first Good Friday.

Take up your cross means embracing our limitations ----- seeing the ways of the world for exactly what they are limiting and constricting --- and fatal.

The world will kill you literally ----- if you don't have Jesus --- it may not happen until your very last day --- but without Christ the world will kill you.

Taking up your cross means dying off to self --- and they way of much of what happens around us --- cultural expressions ---- concerns --- practices and passions --- and growing into eternity with Jesus.

Jesus says ---- point blank in John 8 verse 23 that He is not of this world.

His ways are different ---- divine.

His concerns and focus are different ---- they are God centered.

We are invited into greatness --- salvation --- and eternity ---- by first sinking low ---- deep down into the cross of Christ --- self denial ---- and the very difficult road of death to selfishness and death to "me first".

"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."?

"Deny themselves" --- Jesus says.

Put aside what they think --- know ---- and believe to be true --- and follow me as I teach --- and lead ---- and save them.

Jesus killed off on the cross.

He wasn't killed off but He killed off.

When we take up our cross and follow Him ---- we kill off the natural human inclination to temporal ephemeral concerns --- and are born into a way of being that sees things differently

So differently ----- such that wisdom ----- and the very will of God consumes us --- just as it did Jesus.

There's the old story about two men destined for the same fate --- perhaps some of us have heard this one before.

There's the story about two completely different men destined for the same punishment.

Both were tied by their ankles to a long rope which was then attached to a harness which was then attached to a horse ---- and the horse was set free to run with the men dragging behind

Off they go dragged behind the horse by their ankles ---- banged to and fro -- - beaten down and stretched and scratched to all get out.

The one man can't see beyond the immediate circumstances and is simply bumped around to and fro --- gives up ---- and eventually dies.

The other somehow gets a hold of the rope with his arms and finally drags himself up onto the back of the horse.

And eventually he is able to slow down the horse and untie and free himself --- and the horse.

We can be carried by ----- dragged down and crushed by our cross --- the ways of the world --- strictly human concerns.

Or we can take up our cross --- denying our sinful inclinations and render worldly things secondary ----- get onto the horse ----- concern ourselves with living into God's will.

We can take up our cross and carry it moving on to greater and more faithful things ---- or we can allow our cross --- the ways of the world --- to define who we are.

Remember the cross was a worldly implement of death aimed at ending life.

We can allow ourselves to be ruled by the cross --- or we can pick it up and take it to Christ ---- and follow Him as He so leads us.

The cross is the testimony of God's own submission to the sinful and unjust ways of humanity so that we never have to be subject to them again in any kind of final way.

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And the resurrection is the triumph of the wisdom of God --- the will of God.

Taking up our cross is our way of saying I am joining into and following the one who redefined the cross --- taking it from implement of death into implement of divine fulfillment --- moving from death to life.

Making of it a release point instead of a final holding or defining point --- death.

The way of the cross is all about being broken --- and breaking away from.

On the cross ----- Christ is broken ----- and the will of God is released ---- and unleashed --- cut free as never before.

Unfortunate as it may seem ----- it is very often only when we are broken --- "creamed by the world" ----- as Leonard Cohen puts it ----- that we are truly open --- or opened by God in Christ.

It is so often the case that in moments of extreme pain and disorder ----- we find ourselves opened by God ----- just as when Jesus was broken apart on the cross --- God's will was opened up like never before.

Taking up our cross speaks to a voluntary activity --- a choice ---- a decision made and strategy in place --- following Jesus ---- that will create some opposition --- and fly in the face of much of what we see around us.

Taking up our cross however is not referring to those unpredictable tragedies that sometimes happen to people in life regardless of their commitments ----- the so often misguided ----- "this is my cross to bear" ----- attitude.

At the heart of discipleship ---- at the heart of taking up your cross ----- is the faithful following of the Messiah ----- the setting our minds on divine things that Jesus speaks about to Peter today in verse 33.

Taking up our cross in Christ is allowing ourselves to be broken down and then rebuilt ----- resurrected ---- just as Christ was when He took up His cross.

We don't have a cross to bear --- Christ has already done all of this for us.

Taking up our cross is freeing us from being hindered by it ---- the ways of this world in any kind of final and lasting ways.

We take up our cross to follow Christ --- to follow Him into new life ----- to follow Him into living into God's will and not being limited and held back -- - crippled and killed by concerns of worldly passing things.

Salvation has already been accomplished --- evil has been slayed ----- God wins ----- the battle is over.

Take up your cross means joining in the parade after the great cosmic battle is over ----- and inviting others to do the same and receive the benefits --- grace ---- mercy ---- and salvation in Christ.

The giant has already been slayed.

Loves rules.

Salvation has been granted.

Grace abounds.

Mercy for all.

Take up your cross and follow Christ.

Take up your cross and throw in onto the great pile of hate and greed and injustice and selfishness that Christ did away with as He hung on His cross.

“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

We are not imitating the Christ ---- replicating what He has already done when we take up our cross.

But we are following Him ----- His teachings and way of life --- giving ourselves over into God’s hands so that He can do with us as He so chooses.

Take up your cross ---- follow Christ ---- give yourself over to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than we can ever even imagine.

As we just sang together.

“Take up your cross the Saviour said --- if my disciple you would be ----- deny yourself ---- the world forsake ----- and humbly follow after me.”

When we take up our cross and follow Him ---- He shows us what to do with it.

He frees us from it.

He transforms it ---- and us.

And it’s a beautiful --- powerful ---- mysterious --- saving gospel thing that happens.



Jesus said -----“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

Amen.