

## Sermon

### Mark 8:34 NIV

34 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves & take up their cross & follow me.

### Mark 8:34 The Message

34-37 Calling the crowd to join his disciples, Jesus said, "Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You are not in the driver's seat; I am. Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me & I'll show you how.

**Deny – Take Up – Follow.** This is the essence / the heart of discipleship. Jesus tells us: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves.

## DENY

"To deny ourselves" literally means to "say no to self." According to Rev. Sauer, we must say "yes" to Christ's way which may involve suffering & self-sacrifice; but in doing so we find freedom. It is making ourselves not an end, but a means, in the kingdom of God becoming a vessel through which God can use us."

It is shutting down our egos; it is getting rid of our preoccupations with "I," "Me," & "Mine," our selfish tendencies. It is putting an end to our naval gazing! Getting the focus off of ourselves. The what's in it for me attitudes.

What do you find difficult to deny yourself, to give up – what are you holding on to?

•Anger, Control, Anxiety, Pride, Gluttony, Avarice / extreme greed, Slothfulness – laziness, Lust, Wrath, Envy; holding on to the past, being a workaholic and feeling guilty taking time (Sabbath time, vacation time) to refresh yourself, longing for what was "normal" pre-pandemic, your own personal addiction.

Your ego, My ego, Our preoccupations with "I," "Me," & "Mine," our selfish tendencies. Sometimes we continue to put blame on others, blame the situation, or blame the continuing concerns of the pandemic. Instead of finding creative ways in moving forward with the good news of the gospel! Being the love & light of Jesus in the world, our communities, schools, social groups & homes.

## TAKE UP

Jesus tells us, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves & take up their cross.

Jesus says, "Take up your cross" – there is a cross in your life, in my life that you/I are to pick up. Jesus carried His own cross & for Jesus it meant dying on the cross. We have to identify our own cross to take up.

Jesus said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves & take up their cross. Taking up is something we do, not something that is done to us.

Taking up your/my cross is something you/I must choose to do. You/I must choose to make a sacrifice for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

It means making sacrifices in our lives so that God's purpose can be fulfilled. In the Methodist Tradition this means:

1. Works of Piety (personal devotion & holiness)
2. Works of Mercy (having compassion / loving your neighbor as yourself)

This includes Individual Practices as well as Community Practices.

### **From UMC Communications:**

#### **Works of Piety**

Individual Practices – reading, meditating and studying the scriptures, prayer, fasting, regularly attending worship, healthy living, and sharing our faith with others

Communal Practices – regularly share in the sacraments, Christian conferencing, conversations, (accountability to one another), and Bible study

#### **Works of Mercy**

Individual Practices - doing good works, visiting the sick, visiting those in prison, feeding the hungry, and giving generously to the needs of others; not giving the handout or the hand up – but reaching the hand across (mutuality); working for the benefit of all; seeing the eyes of Jesus looking back at us from each person we meet.

Communal Practices – seeking justice, ending oppression and discrimination (John Wesley challenged Methodists to end slavery), addressing the needs of the poor; doing the hard work of anti-racism work; God calls us to be peacemakers (each day we hear about more violence)...

Taking up our cross is a choice we must make. This is not an easy thing to do. Together we need to take note that there are consequences to our actions as well as our inaction.

When we choose to take up our cross, we are making a commitment to the Kingdom of God; we are taking the greatest commandment to heart. This means that as faithful followers, as disciples of Jesus Christ we are living an intentional faith life; bringing the Kingdom of God here on earth & taking Holy risks.

Taking Holy Risks to where God is leading.... Being a part of what God is already doing!

Allowing the Holy Spirit to lead us.....

Remembering God's promise to the Israelites .... I will go before you, I will lead you.... You are my people ... God still goes before us today.

Taking up our cross is also an act of Love. & we are called to keep on loving because that is what a faithful follower, a disciple of Jesus does.

Are you challenged to love like Jesus? To love all... to love the unlovable... to love people who do not look like us, dress like us, speak like us, smell like us or act like us. It means reaching out to people who nobody sees & nobody wants. Loving others means building relationships with people we do not know yet.... Easy no...but this is where the good stuff is.....

## **FOLLOW**

Jesus said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves & take up their cross & follow me.

### **Mark 10:17-24**

The Rich & the Kingdom of God (NIV)

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him & fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good, except God alone.

You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father & mother. Teacher, he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy."

Jesus looked at him & loved (I love you enough to tell you the truth) him. "One thing you lack," Jesus said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor & you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Jesus looked around & said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

Do you see yourself in the rich man? Is there something in your life keeping you from following Jesus?

Maybe wanting things to be what they once were; having family living closer and not all over the globe. Slowing down in our daily lives instead of having our schedules so packed we may forget what day it is...

When we long for what is comfortable we may miss the opportunities God is giving us to move forward for God's kingdom. Stepping outside our comfort zone, is not easy, but this is where the good stuff is .... The good stuff of sharing the love and grace of Jesus Christ....

Deny – Take up – Follow: Yes, this is a daily challenge. Yes, following Jesus means making a commitment and being accountable not only to Jesus but to each other; each of us needs to make a decision like the rich man. Where is your heart right now when it comes to faithfully following Jesus as his disciple? Where is your life right now when it comes to following Jesus as his disciple?

Faithfully following Jesus as a faithful disciple includes: Do no harm, Do good & Stay in love with God. (The 3 Simple Rules).

Another way to faithfully follow Jesus as his disciple is by practicing John Wesley's 5 Means of Grace: Scripture, Prayer, Holy Communion, Fasting & Christian Conferencing.

From a day with the Bishop: This is what it means as UM to follow Jesus:

- Belief in & Worship of the Divine Trinity: Father, Son & Holy Spirit
- Belief in the full Divinity of Jesus Christ
- Belief in the atonement & work of Jesus
- Belief in & worship of Biblical Authority
- Belief in original sin – connected to original righteousness & repentance
- Belief in justification by faith alone
- Belief in regeneration & holiness
- Belief in Christian Community
- Belief in the sacrament of Baptism
- Belief in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper

Deny, Take Up and Follow: This is what it means to be a disciple, a faithful follower of Jesus Christ. This is not easy but this is where the good stuff is.

Our daily challenge is to allow the Holy Spirit to transform our lives, as we deny, take up and follow Jesus as even stronger faithful followers.

Jesus said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves, take up their cross & follow me ... Are you ready to follow Jesus in a greater way? Amen!