

Jesus' invitation to the disciples was: FOLLOW ME. They dropped everything and followed. But now it seemed like Jesus was changing the rules in midstream. The disciples, and especially Peter, didn't really understand what Jesus was talking about when he talked about dying on the cross. In Jesus' day, a cross wasn't just a symbol of pain and suffering, it was mainly a symbol of death. What Jesus was telling them was that they needed to put to death their own plans and desires, and turn their lives over to him and do his will everyday.

But just like the disciples, and like Christians down through the ages, we have trouble understanding what Jesus meant by: TAKE UP YOUR CROSS. We've defined that in an abundance of different ways. There are people who are emotionally wounded who seek healing in church but then wind up letting their hurts spill out and wound others. We have talked about these people being our cross to bear. We have talked about bad habits being a cross to bear. We have laughingly talked about a friend or child or a spouse as that particular cross to bear. But those aren't really crosses. Those are just burdens that are heavy and weigh us down. We should not compare them to the cross Jesus bore for our sins. Jesus meant something far deeper when he told his disciples to carry their cross. He said to them, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."

Forward Day by Day, first published in 1935, is available quarterly here at St. Luke's. It is a booklet of daily inspirational meditations reflecting on specific Bible passages chosen from the Daily Lectionary Readings as listed in the Revised Common Lectionary or the Daily Office from the Book of Common Prayer. The meditations are rich in substance and offer a wide range of witness and experiences.

A meditation from November 13, year unknown, on taking up our cross and following Jesus. "Heaviest are the burdens in the area of personal relationships which are with us daily with no way out, in sight: a child born with some untreatable physical or mental condition, a spouse totally disabled requiring unrelenting attention for life, a friend or family member who has betrayed or rejected us, and many other such problems. In the midst of all this, Jesus says to take up your cross and follow him, whatever the situation. Such burdens are a part of what it means by our cross in life to be borne openly without flinching or self-pity.

Then, there is that other dimension of taking up our cross and following Jesus which is recognizing there are persons around us who are not in a close relationship to us but who need care and attention and to whom we move out to help in ways appropriate to their situation of need, whether it is poverty, hunger, homelessness, or illiteracy. We do not move out to help because of a sense of indebtedness to them, but rather help them as part of our covenanted

role of servant to God's creatures. It is an aggressive purposeful action forsaking self by following our Crucified Lord who leads the way."

You see, Jesus doesn't simply call us to believe that he existed, or even believe that he can save us. He calls on us to commit our whole lives to him - to trust him alone for our salvation, and then to follow him as his disciples. He said, "Anyone who does not carry his cross, and follow me cannot be my disciple." So for you, that may mean giving up certain things to honor Jesus' sacrifice for you. which he taught us, things like: loving our neighbors, but it can also mean taking on extra things just as Jesus took on our sin. But what we don't want to do is trivialize the idea of taking up our cross because it has deep spiritual significance. Following Jesus means living out the priorities and the truths loving our enemies and neighbors, going the extra mile, turning the other cheek, praying for those who hate you and being God's instrument of love in this world. And in order to do that, you have to deny yourself. (Remember Jesus said, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." Jesus took up his cross so we could have life and by taking up he cross, Jesus threw us that lifeline. All he asks is that we become people of The Way. We do that by following, taking up our cross and denying ourselves.

In his mercy, God provided a sacrifice of himself: Jesus, the Son of God, who took all the punishment and the penalty of our sin for us on the cross, so that through his death all who believe in him may obtain forgiveness and salvation. Jesus' invitation to his disciples was: take up your cross, follow me, and let your light shine in all you do. Is Christ the master of your life? Have you put to death your own plans and committed yourself to his will for your life? Don't be satisfied with anything less, for there is no greater joy in life than following Jesus every day. Amen.

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February 27 and 28, 2021