

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time | For Sunday, September 12, 2021

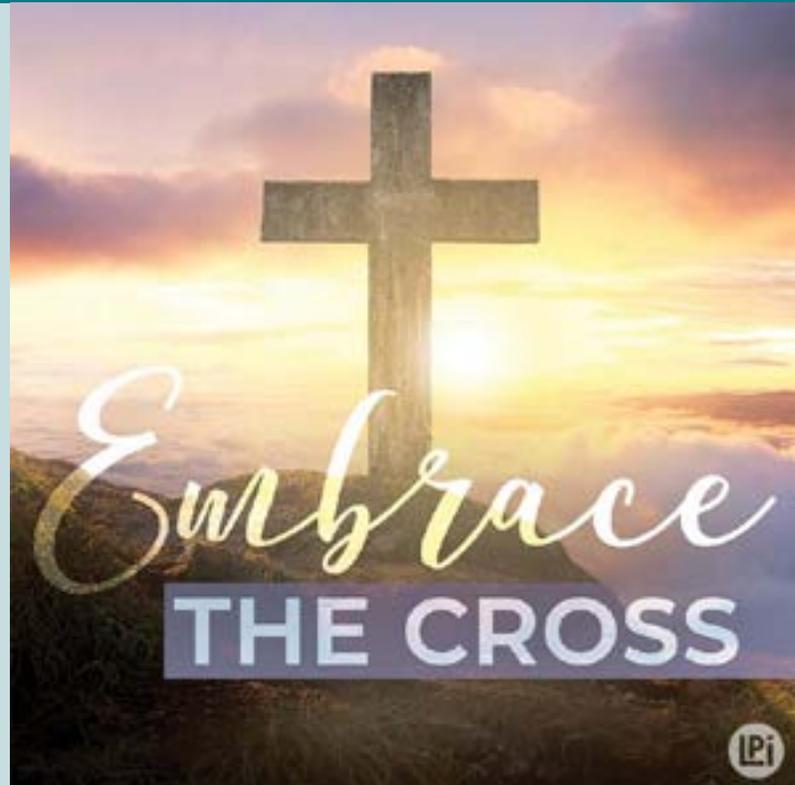
Understanding Faithful Discipleship

Written by Bro. Silas Henderson, S.D.S.

Isaiah 50:5-9a

James 2:14-18

Mark 8:27-35



Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and rise after three days... He summoned the crowd with his disciples and said to them, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." —Mark 8:31, 34

We've all experienced it: life was wonderful and everything seemed to be going along smoothly. Your career and relationships were moving forward with no conflicts or stress. Your family members were healthy. You knew you were loved and you were surrounded by your loved ones.

And then, *it* happened. A phone call reporting an accident or death. Your child or parent has gotten sick. A job has been lost ... Whatever *it* was, things changed for you and your family. There was no going back to before.

I imagine that Peter and the Apostles experienced that same sinking feeling when they heard Jesus say that he would have to suffer and die. After all, things had been going so well for Jesus and his friends as they traveled from town to town, teaching the crowds and healing the sick.

[This Sunday's gospel](#) falls at the half-way point of Mark's Gospel and signals a turning point as Jesus begins his journey to Jerusalem where he will eventually suffer betrayal, rejection, and torture, before dying on a cross.

Although we know that the story ends with the Easter morning Resurrection, in the passage we hear this Sunday, the Resurrection is a far-off event. Peter and the Apostles weren't prepared to hear that something horrible was looming on the horizon.

When Jesus asks Peter, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter’s reply is spot on: “You are the Christ.” This is a great statement of Peter’s faith, but it was also loaded with political and cultural implications. For Peter and many of Jesus’ other followers, the Christos — the Messiah or “anointed one” — would be the long-awaited king who would bring justice and prosperity to the oppressed People of Israel. But Jesus makes it clear that he is not that kind of messiah and his followers won’t enjoy royal privileges.

Jesus explains that, if those traveling with him are to be true disciples, they will have to imitate his example, “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.”

By telling us to “take up” our cross, Jesus isn’t saying that we have to meekly submit to unfair treatment and suffering or embrace a blind, “offer it up” sort of spirituality. And, while they may be opportunities for grace, illness, sad events or even disasters aren’t “the cross.” There is nothing particularly Christian about many of the challenges we face in daily life. Finally, we can never silently or blindly accept abuse or injustice as being the will of God. Jesus rejected these and so should we. Instead, “the cross” that we are to carry is the sacrifices, trials, and hardships that can be a consequence of placing our faith and hope in him and of living according to his teaching.

The consequences — or “cost” — of discipleship (to borrow the phrase from [Dietrich Bonhoeffer](#)) can take two forms. The first is that by saying “yes” to Jesus, we willingly set aside ways of thinking and acting that are at odds with the Christian life. Faithful discipleship demands that we sacrifice for the good of others, promote peace and justice, and seek God’s will in whatever comes our way. It means being a person of love and hope. The second consequence is much more dramatic and costly, physical suffering and even death for the sake of Jesus and the Gospel.

PRAYER

O Lord,
by all your dealings with us,
whether of joy or pain,
of light or darkness,
let us be brought to you.
Let us value no treatment of your grace
simply because it makes us happy
or because it makes us sad,
or because it gives or denies us what we want.

But may all that you send us
bring us to you,
that knowing your perfectness
we may be sure in every disappointment
that you are still loving us,
and in every darkness
that you are still enlightening us,
and in every enforced idleness
that you are still using us,
yes in every death,
that you are giving us life. Amen.

-Rev. Phillips Brooks (d. 1893),
reprinted in the [New St. Joseph
People’s Prayer Book](#)

As we know, countless Christians around the world have suffered — and continue to suffer — simply because of their faith in Jesus. We can think of so many examples from the past months and years of Christians who have suffered exile, whose communities have been ravaged, and of those who have given their lives for their faith. Pope Francis reflected on this reality [when he remarked](#), “May the Lord, today, make us feel within the body of the Church, the love for our martyrs and also our vocation to martyrdom. We do not know what will happen here: we do not know.”

As we embrace the cross and accept the consequences of following Jesus the Christ, we can find comfort and strength in the knowledge that the cross was not the end for Jesus and it is not the end of our story either. Jesus conquered death. The Resurrection transforms the cross — his and ours — into a sign of hope and life, “Whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it.”

Bro. Silas Henderson, S.D.S.