

Let us Deny Ourselves

Mark 8:27-38

St. Andrew's, Waterford

September 15, 2024

The Rt. Rev. Dr. Bonnie A. Perry

Proper 19, 24<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

May the God who creates us, redeems us, and sustains us, be with us this day, and remain with us always. Amen.

Good Morning!

Friends, what does it mean to follow Jesus?

Jesus says, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

Deny yourself and take up your cross...

In that day and age as theologian Darrell Bock alludes to in his Commentary on the Gospel of Mark, the idea of crucifixion as a means of torture and execution was well known enough that we do not need to think of this as a specific reference to Jesus' own death. (*Mark: New Cambridge Bible Commentary p 245.*) So when the people listening to Jesus heard him say, pick up your cross, their initial response could only have been incredulous and repulsed. What do you mean, I'm supposed to let go of my longings and embrace a wretched means of dying? "The cross, you want me to carry around a cross?" This is not at all how the people who were gathering around Jesus, thought that he would change things, (Bock p 245).

Jesus is saying, quite clearly, what I am asking of you, is a very different way of being in the world.

Jesus is telling the folks to take up their cross and follow him, right after Peter has pulled him aside and advised him to tone down his rhetoric. And Jesus has said to Peter, "Get behind me Satan." From the very beginning Jesus tells his followers and would be disciples, following me, is not going to be easy, this is not going to be as you imagine, a new world will come, but not through the means you imagine.

And from the very beginning we who would follow Jesus have gotten confused with how we might respond. We get confused, I have gotten confused, with what it means to follow Jesus.

What do I like, that I might have to deny?

I like being insightful.

I like being helpful.

I like acting and doing.

I enjoy leading.

Whereas, some of us like winning, and others of us like to wait and keep all of our options open.

I prefer to isolate topics, rather than taking them as a whole and potentially being weighed down by the vast interlocking systems that can be overwhelming. Some of us like being in a crowd, while others of us long to be by ourselves.

Our preferences are usually tied closely to the gifts and skills that God has given each of us. I do not believe that Jesus' admonition to deny ourselves means that we completely relinquish our talents. But I do believe it means that each of us to be followers of Christ, must stop and understand that there are many more ways besides our own. So Jesus is calling his would be followers to deny and set aside their own preferences so that there is room to take in all the other possibilities for how we can be in this our world.

Each of us, made in God's image and likeness, has sparks of holiness, yet the true wisdom of Christ is much more evident in the community of the whole.

Or as a friend of mine, the Rev. Dr. Gregory Straub, once said in a sermon of his: "If you think you know what Jesus wants, think again, there is a decent chance that by ourselves we've gotten it wrong. Together we can comprehend so much more.

Our beliefs are not the only legitimate perspectives. Our avenues are not the only avenues toward new life.

So let us open up ourselves and our communities, let us listen to the many and varied voices of our world.

So I say to myself and I say this to all of us, if we wish to follow Jesus, let us deny ourselves and together pick up the cross.

In Christ's Holy name.

Amen.