

Sunday 21st June 2020

Jesus says: “Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me”

Hymn: In Christ Alone
(Number 351 in Singing the Faith)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IOT_HhM9bf4

Let us pray

Turn your ear towards us, O God, and speak comfort to us for we come to you in need.

We are completely devoted to you and we trust in you alone to restore us.

Extend your grace and make our hearts glad, for we know you are good and forgiving, and we long to live in your steadfast love forever.

Once we lived in the shadow of fear and sin, but our former selves were crucified with Christ, and every fear and sin were destroyed.

And if we have died with Christ, then we believe that we will also be alive with Christ.

So, let us consider ourselves dead to fear and sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus, so let us live in the light of faith.

Amen

Bible Reading: Matthew 10: 24-39
<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2010:24-39&version=NIV>

Hymn: Will you come and follow me (Number 673 in Singing the Faith)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GiXnbOORTAU>

Message

Jesus said, “Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me”.

We’ve all heard someone say something like ‘I told you being a Christian wasn’t easy’ or ‘we all have our cross to bear’ – and usually, while these things are often said in jest, they tend to mean or relate to some sort of burden or hardship.

But what does it really mean to take up your cross and follow Jesus – that’s what I want us to think about this morning and what I hope to do is to dispel the myth, that taking up your cross and following Jesus somehow makes you miserable, and somehow leads to woe and hardship.

But first, let’s just remind ourselves of what going to the cross meant for Jesus.

It meant being betrayed by someone from his close circle of friends; it meant being wrongly accused and arrested; it meant being beaten, spat at, punched, flogged; it meant being chained up; it meant being given an unfair trial; it meant watching the man who had the power to spare him give way to the crowd; it even meant that the Rock, (the disciple not the wrestling megastar), denied that he knew him.

And then it meant that long, painful journey to Golgotha, carrying his own cross; it meant having nails driven through both his hands and his feet and being tied in such a way as to restrict breathing and movement; and then it meant death – the sort of death reserved by the authorities for the lowest of the low.

Well I’m sorry to disappoint, but that’s not my experience of the cross – and I’m not sure that it’s yours either.

And that’s because we know what happened next – we know that on the third day Jesus was alive again – and we know it is through his resurrection that God broke the power of all that is evil, both in the world and in ourselves.

Jesus Christ suffered death and was raised again for us, so that we might be saved, that we might turn away from sin, and that we might accept the gift of grace, given freely for us despite the fact, that we don’t deserve it.

The cross wasn’t the end of the journey for Jesus and neither is it the end of the journey for us. I believe that when Jesus said “take up your cross and follow me” he meant that we need to turn away from our own plans and desires, seek forgiveness and seek new life in Jesus Christ.

You see, Jesus doesn’t simply call us to believe that he existed, or even to 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

And that doesn’t make me miserable, I don’t see that as being a burden or a hardship.

Rather, it fills me with joy, so much joy in fact, that I don't know what to do with it all!

*The pain will not define us
Joy will reignite us
You're the song
Of our hearts*

Following Jesus doesn't mean that bad stuff won't or can't happen – people will still get ill, people will still lose their jobs, people will still die. But following Jesus means that God is with us in the good times and the bad. He will rejoice with us, He will share our pain, He will carry us when we feel unable to carry on. He will continually bring us to new life.

The world that we live in has much in common with the cross of Good Friday; bitterness, abuse of authority, lust for power, hate and envy, fighting, rage and anger, back-stabbing, manipulation, unforgiveness.

But, for the Christian, the cross of Good Friday stands empty, empty of all those things. And when those things have gone, the cross is lit up with grace, humility, forgiveness and love.

So, I pray this morning that we show that we are worthy by once again taking up our cross and renewing that passion we have to follow Jesus.

And as we do, I pray also that we will be so filled with God's love that it overflows so much that we have no choice but to let it spill out as we share the Good News through our words and through our actions with everyone that we meet. Today, tomorrow and for evermore.

Amen.

Prayers for others

Open our hearts Lord, we pray, that we may hear your word and share our fears and our faith.

Let us respect the gifts in each other, all of which are necessary for the common good, but which none of us has in full. May we have the confidence and the courage to proclaim our trust in you and your love for us. Give us the strength to persevere, even when we meet resistance.

We pray for the Church, its leaders and followers, joined in discipleship. Let us be servants so in our church and community, to enable us to carry out your commandment to love our neighbours as ourselves.

Where there are differences, may they be resolved through your loving presence. And may our church and family responsibilities support each other, but may they both be focused on you, Father of all.

Somewhere in your world there is conflict and bloodshed. We do not hold you responsible, loving Lord, but we pray for your intervention and reconciliation.

Give to those in authority, as well as those in the midst of the struggles, a glimpse of peace, the hope of resolution and set hearts and minds free of hate and awaken them to the power of your love.

We pray for those who are ill, give them relief from pain and the will to recover their strength.

We remember those who have died and are now in your closer presence. May those who mourn feel your comfort and your love for them in their tears.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G-9W8v5RHj0>

Hymn: Joy (Rend Collective)

(Not in Singing the Faith)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VDiETOLByxA>

Blessing

The Lord bless you and keep you;
The Lord make His face shine upon you,
And be gracious to you;
The Lord lift up His countenance upon you,
And give you peace.

Amen

