

“Take up your cross”

We are offering a series of reflections for individuals and churches who may be finding it difficult to provide midweek prayer and shared learning from Scripture. You can use these by watching the YouTube video, reading the relevant Bible passage and then reflecting on the questions below. To help make this a shared activity, you are encouraged to reflect on this together with friends using an online conference package, or simply arrange with a friend for them to watch it too. Then ring each other up, share your thoughts and responses and then pray for one another, and pray together for our world.

Read Mark 8:34-38

If you can, watch the YouTube Video: <https://youtu.be/X4FlyLtYxG8>

Our key focus for the best part of a year now has been to “save lives” – this is why we have been willing to sacrifice so much and endure such disruption. We might struggle therefore, to make sense of words of Jesus that speak of losing our lives. But Jesus does not say this to diminish the value of human life, but rather to underline it. If we have been willing to invest so much to preserve physical life, what do we need to be willing to do to help people discover and embrace eternal life? “Take up your cross” is an invitation to every Christian disciple, but it is also the message the Jesus has entrusted to his Church. As we reflect on the events of the last 12 months, what have we learned about the priority we need to give to sharing that message? What should we be willing to change and give up in order to make that message known? Take a few moments to reflect on the three elements in Jesus’ invitation:

Deny Yourself: Taking up the cross might require us to let go of something else. What does it mean for you when Jesus says “deny yourself”? Those who first heard this, would have been told that they were God’s people through being born into the right tribe and nation. There were plenty of voices around telling them how they needed to live as part of that nation – everyone would have come to Jesus with their own ideas and agendas. There are still plenty of conflicting voices around telling us that they know what’s best for us – they know who’s right and who’s wrong in terms of faith – but Jesus says “forget about yourself, forget about looking after number 1 or believing that you are any more right or wrong than anyone else. Forget about your pre-conceived ideas or trying to define faith in a way that serves your own interests.” What does it mean to come to Jesus free from self-ambition and pre-determined ideas?

Take up your cross. Jesus addresses the whole crowd with these words, but he invites his hearers to take up YOUR cross. He addresses them as individuals – to be prepared to stand out from the crowd and work out what it means for **us** to be a disciple. The cross was of course a symbol of sacrifice - for just about everyone who heard Jesus say this, it epitomised everything they were opposed to. It was the symbol of the power and oppression of the Roman empire. Jesus makes it clear that discipleship is not about hiding away from reality but embracing it and recognising that anything we sacrifice in this life is worth the salvation of eternity. But the cross also is a sign of eternal hope – it is here that Jesus not only confronted death but defeated it. It is here he brought forgiveness and threw open the doorway to God’s eternal kingdom. Are we prepared to do whatever it takes to make the message of the cross known?

Follow me: Jesus doesn’t give us a roadmap – he promises to walk with us. But notice that Jesus has just been speaking about his own death and resurrection – he is not offering any illusions about what that might entail. Our key calling as disciples is to follow Jesus. To follow is to not be fixed but to be ready to move on. To follow means that we recognise we have further to go – none of us is the finished article. To follow is not to necessarily even know where we are going, but to place our confidence in the person who is leading us there. Where is Jesus calling us to follow?

PRAYER: Loving Lord Jesus, as we find ourselves in a world that is laced with uncertainty and hope, fear and opportunity, help us to be those who truly take up our cross and follow you. AMEN