

## **Sermon for 28 February 2021 – Second Sunday of Lent**

**Rev. Jackie Bullen**

**Mark 8. 31-end**

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Jesus says to us, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.' Words that we may be familiar with, but are they words that we understand enough to know what to do with them?

As we worship this morning, we are aware that through Lent we are moving towards that Holy week which will come very soon which ends with Christ on the cross. What does that Holy week mean to us as followers of Christ, as his disciples today in the 21st century.

Today's reading is a very appropriate one for Lent 2021 as it reminds us that Christ is throwing down the gauntlet, setting us a challenge to face.

He is encouraging us to take it up our cross, but he is also saying, if you're ready to accept the invitation to be my disciple, then you must also be willing to follow me.

Challenging words, which at first glance it may seem to be an easy choice to make, but when it is stripped back and laid bare, is it really as simple as it seems.

Jesus said, "Take up your cross." In other words, pick it up yourself. This means that we have a choice to make.

Christ had a choice as to whether he was going to pick up his cross. He could have said No, but he didn't and bore it to Golgotha, and while it is incredibly unlikely that if we bear our cross then we will face death, we still have a choice whether to accept His invitation and pick ours up and bear it or to walk away.

But what does it mean to bear your cross?

Bearing our cross is a choice. It's a voluntary form of sacrificial obedience that identifies us completely with Jesus Christ.

Bearing our cross isn't about making the best of a situation or circumstance. It's something we deliberately choose to take up and risk the consequences.

But we don't usually like that idea. It makes us uncomfortable. So what does bearing our cross mean to us?

No doubt we will all have our own view, for me it reminds me of one of my favourite poems by Robert Frost:

***Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveller, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To see where it bent in the undergrowth;  
Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them, really about the same.  
And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden back,  
O, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet, knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.  
I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence;  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I --  
I took the one less travelled by,  
And that has made all the difference.***

When we take up our cross, we step out into the unknown, the less travelled road as it were, it can be much more difficult, because we don't know what could be there around the next corner.

But as much as it can fill us with trepidation, it can also fill us with joy and happiness as we experience what it has to offer.

It's up to each of us how we approach it, whether it is with fear or with eager anticipation.

Christ is certainly speaking about this kind of choice today, he is laying out what is going to happen during his ministry, and preparing them for the parts which they are going to find difficult, the suffering, the rejection and ultimately his death on the cross.

But he is also alluding to the resurrection, and the joys that this will bring.

No one at that point in, what is now our history, had the benefit of hindsight, they were not re-living the events, they were actually living them.

Experiencing everything first hand, and making choices from their gut, and doing the best that they could. Whereas, we are in the more privileged position, we know what happened, because we can read their accounts.

But even with this information, this knowledge, it can only take us so far, because the rest of the road asks us to take that step of faith. To follow where he wants to lead, without us knowing how our own future is going to unfold. This is what being a Christian, a disciple, means. Allowing Christ into our lives in a way that we don't yet know, to allow Him to be our guide.

Taking up your cross and following Him is about trust, and the obedience, of giving oneself and knowing that wherever He leads will be a place of love and grace as we enter into deeper relationship with our saviour.

The cross is the principle symbol of Christianity, we say this at every baptism we perform. It holds special meaning for every one of us who identifies with Jesus Christ. Whenever we see a cross, it speaks to us of Christ's resolute determination to do His Father's will by dying for us.

It's all about each of us making a deliberate and personal choice. The cross is about discipline, hard work, obedience, and commitment. It isn't easy, but it draws us closer to Christ and makes us more Christ-like, for never has a symbol of such pain and torture been transformed into a symbol of unending love and hope which is recognised the world over.

When we come to the point where each one of us can say. 'I am making a wholehearted commitment to God in my life', - then prayer and reading our Bible will become central to our daily lives.

We will search the Scriptures to know more of the will of God, and the welcome we have for others in and outside of church will be intensified, and our love for others will be evident in all of our actions.

'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.' Christ offers us a choice, one which can change our lives in ways we cannot know. Dare we follow him, and choose the way of the cross for ourselves?

Amen.