

**“Giving up and Finding”**  
**By Rev. Frances Savill**  
**Sunday September 15, 2024**

**Readings:**

**Mark 8:27-38**

*“If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me.<sup>35</sup> If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it. <sup>36</sup> And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul?<sup>[d]</sup> <sup>37</sup> Is anything worth more than your soul? <sup>38</sup> If anyone is ashamed of me and my message in these adulterous and sinful days, the Son of Man will be ashamed of that person when he returns in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”*

How do you hear these words?  
Are they good news?

When Jesus says to us: “Come follow me” we know instinctually that Jesus is calling us to a new life and a new way of life.

And that all feels a little threatening especially at the beginning.

And Jesus says we will have to “take up our crosses”, and he is not talking about wearing jewellery around our neck.

The cross is a symbol of suffering and shame. We know that people in the early church, and people around the world today, are persecuted for their faith, and do give up their lives for Jesus.

So how do we hear these words?

Jesus is clear that we are to give up our own way, taking up a cross, and if try to hang on to our lives, we will lose them, and if we are ashamed of Jesus, when he does return in glory, he will be ashamed of us also.

A little context is helpful, I think.

Peter has just had this incredible epiphany.

His eyes were opened and he has recognized that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.

That is the starting point.

When we know the truth of those words, Jesus is the Messiah, the hope and Saviour of the world, then we are ready for our world to be rocked by Jesus' words; ***because, we are called to a whole new life.***

Daily, we are called to give our lives to Jesus, to serve his mission, his plan, and not live for ourselves.

But we need to consider what this means carefully, because we all too often view Jesus' language of cross-bearing and denial through the lens of Weight Watchers.

We start to think in terms of having a little less of the things we like, don't overindulge in the things that make us happy, cut enjoyment calories whenever possible because Christians in the end aren't really to be happy – at least not too happy.

But I don't think that's what Jesus is talking about at all.

I think instead he's suggesting that the "life" that has been packaged and sold to us isn't real life and we need to die to those illusions to be born into the abundant life God wants for us.

We tend to think that life is something you go out and get, or earn, or buy, or win.

But it turns out that life is like love, it can't be won or earned or bought, only given away.

And the more you give it away, the more you have.

But it also means giving up our selfishness, our self-centeredness, our whine that we want our own way, and it's all about us.

I have been a Christian for a lot of years, but I hear that whine come back into my voice more often than I care to admit.

Self-seeking, selfishness is something seems to come back like a boomerang.

I find Frederick Buechener's words helpful:

*"When you love somebody, it is no longer yourself who is the center of your own universe.*

*It is the one you love who is.*

*You forget about yourself. You deny yourself.*

*You give of yourself so that by all the rules of arithmetical logic there should be less of yourself than there was to start with.*

*Only by a curious paradox there is more.*

*You feel that at last you really are yourself.*

*You give up your old self-seeking self for somebody you love and thereby become yourself at last."*

(Wishful Thinking F. Buechner

p.84)

I was eleven when first my eyes were opened and I knew the truth of the gospel.

In my teenage years I wandered from God, and wasn't interested in living for anyone but myself.

But I knew the truth, and I knew that the path I was on wasn't going to lead to any good place. And so I settled things again – repented – turned around- turned back to Jesus and started to learn about taking up a cross, and giving my life to him.

This road has taken me into ordained ministry, a path I did not want to go.

It took me to being a full-time solo minister of a church, again a path I did not want to go. But in giving my life into Jesus' hands it's a better life than I could have imagined.

I was glad to do the children's story this morning because the parables of the kingdom are a parallel teaching.

We have found the greatest treasure.

And we have been found by our Saviour, Jesus, who invites us to learn to live life in a way that gives abundant life:

*To be forgetful about ourselves.*

*And even to learn to deny ourselves.*

*to give of ourselves daily, trusting Jesus and his way, even when it is the way of the cross.*

*Here we find that this is in fact wonderful, good news, for the world thinks when we give ourselves away, give some of our stuff away, when we live following Jesus we will be lessened, there should be less of ourselves than there was to start with. Only by a curious paradox of the Kingdom, there is more.*

*In living Jesus' way we find that at last we really are ourselves, we find our lives, we find abundant life.*

Jesus said; If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

Learning to love Jesus, learning to keep his commandments, learning to love God and learning to love others with your whole heart, you find the treasure above all others, and thereby become yourself at last.

Thanks be to God.