

Christian Discipleship...A Demanding Self-Sacrificial Life

22nd Week of Ordinary Time - Matthew 16:21-27

The gospel this week is known as a prediction story, one of three in the gospel of Matthew. A prediction story tells, in Jesus' own words, what type of Messiah he will be, what type of death he will endure. The Jewish people were looking for a king who would restore Israel to its former great status. The people of Israel expected a military leader who could, if needed, lead them into battle to defeat their enemies.

This week, Jesus dispels any notion that he has come to reign through military strength. Jesus indicates today that he will not be that type of leader. His kingdom is God's Kingdom, an eternal relationship that is built on peace, love and justice. Suffering and death is what is demanded of anyone who wishes to follow Christ.

This is a foreign idea to Jesus' disciples. Death has always been equated with defeat. Jesus is suggesting that suffering and death is what leads to triumph. Peter is the first to object to Jesus' prediction, **"God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to you."** Jesus turns on Peter, **"Get behind me Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do."**

Poor Peter. Just one week ago he was declaring Jesus as the "anointed one" of God. Peter was given the keys to the kingdom and appointed the one who is the foundation of the Church. Today, Jesus is calling him Satan. So what has changed?

The real issue for Peter, for any of us who wish to follow Christ, is summed up in the next part of the gospel. Jesus said to his disciples, **"Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."**

Christian discipleship calls each one of us to take up the burden of Christ's cross, making a conscious choice to walk the same journey to Jerusalem that Christ did for us. In so doing, we may suffer, we will someday die. In giving away our life in a sacrificial way, we will win the prize of eternal life.

Blessings!

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