

Sermon Notes: Sept 15, 2024
[Lectionary Readings](#)

Focus: Take up cross and follow

The Gospel last week was in Syro-Phoenicia and now we jump to Caesarea Philippi in Mark 8. You've probably heard Jesus saying, "take up your cross" so many times that it has lost its impact. I would like us to think about 'taking up crosses' in order to loosen our grip on cherished, sometimes counterproductive notions about who we are, and who we should strive to be. We are so much more resilient and flexible than we give ourselves credit for when we follow Jesus.

Mark 8

"Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi"

There was much debate about Jesus' identity, and he asked:

*"But who do you say that I am?"
Peter answered him,
"You are the Messiah."*

Jesus started talking about suffering, but Peter didn't like it:

"And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

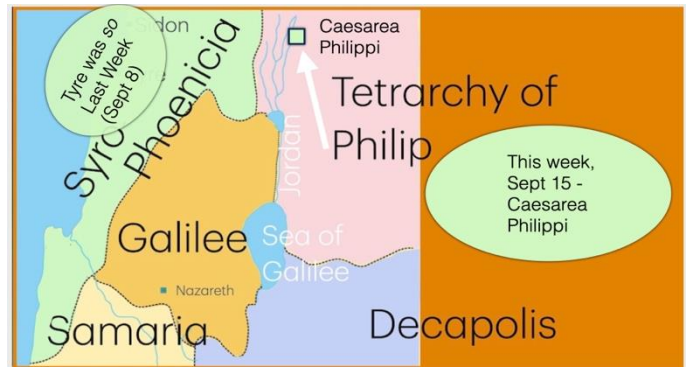
Finally, to rub salt on the wound, he broadcasts his corrections to the crowd:

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "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."

Apocalyptic Fantasy In my fledging Christianity, I was exposed to what I now consider spiritual abuse. We did a Bible study on this very passage in my youth group. My youth pastor read a story in the literal dark. I think it was from the *Voice of the Martyrs*, but I can't be sure. He shared a story of young Russian Christian being gunned down for kissing a picture of Jesus. After reading the story, he had a friend bust through the door, flip on the lights, and ask, "Who do say Jesus is?"

I would wonder if I had the fortitude to be assassinated for proclaiming Jesus. I was deeply ashamed that I probably would have saved my own skin instead of kissing the icon of Jesus. Today, thank God that we are not in an active war zone, but still there are many Christians who actively hope for open warfare to usher in the end of days and stoke their persecution fantasies.

But I want to focus on less fantastic ways we can follow the way of the cross where we decenter the obsessive focus on self, achievement, and security.

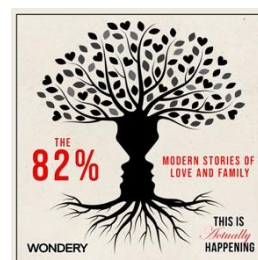


1 Workism work is a place where we really grow and stretch ourselves, but when it substitutes for our identity, it's harder to let go and follow the way of the cross. It can become satanic (in the way Jesus used it). Some of you have the luxury of your hardest working years behind you. However, the generations below you are still on the treadmill. They need you to be a place of refuge from the intense pressure of 21st Century America. Pet Peeve: please don't ever tell them: *find a job you love, and you'll never work a day in your life*. The highest achieving among us are assaulted by a culture of workism and they need you to accept the challenges unique to them. Work is necessary, but it is not the final source of meaning.

Here is a great, now 5-year-old article on workism:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/02/religion-workism-making-americans-miserable/583441/>

2 Family when my kids were little, we lived the modern version of *Leave it to Beaver* in Houston. There was a certain freedom having one as the primary caregiver and one working. This is increasingly rare outside of the toniest parts of the Bay Area. I have shared this before but: 18% of American households are “nuclear families” while the other 82% are not. The 82% are empty nesters, multigenerational households, never had kids, non-traditional arrangements, and living alone.



5% of the total US population are Leave-it-to-Beaver-Single-Earner-Nuclear families (according to bls data): To say it another way, only 30% of all nuclear families are single earner households. Look on line 9 of this link for the data <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/famee.to4.htm> It strikes me as quixotic that our churches are all fighting over the 5%. We are to be a sanctuary for all people and serve the 5%, but not obsess over them.

Way of Life The message of the Gospel is a way of life for 100% of us. Do you have a “traditional” family? That’s great, but that’s not the default or desired way for everyone. It can become a stumbling block, a satanic idol, and difficult to maintain. This article describes some of the problems we create by idolizing a certain type of family:

<https://www.damemagazine.com/2024/05/30/the-insidious-trap-of-the-tradwife-movement/>

Take up your cross Even if your life is relatively free of suffering, you’re not off the hook. What we are ‘selling’ our kids and grandkids is hurting them. We sometimes tell them that if they try hard enough, they can have a cross-free life. May we all find the grace to see the path to follow Jesus. We can take up the cross each day, while not creating unhelpful static for ourselves and our families.

Maybe the Beatles were right, “All you need is love *and* a little help from your friends” Jesus, our friend, knows that the cross is far more life giving than our fantasies about a perfect life.

Todd