

Prayer: Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth.

O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit, we may be truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations... (Peace of drawing close to you)

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight, you who are rock and redeemer of us all. Amen.

Good Morning! Peace be with you! How is it with your soul? It is well with my soul.

Today **we are called to take up the cross**. As Christians in 2024, we know that taking up the cross involves letting go of certain expectations of safety and acceptance in order to stand for the Gospel message of love.

Jesus was very clear that following him might not be a smooth ride. He was bound to choose the just way, not the easy way, through life. How are we to take up the mission of Jesus — justice, compassion, and mercy, in our day?

Let's begin with prayer. *Motivating and invigorating God, You challenge us to walk a difficult path. Show us, as Jesus did, that letting go of our own security and comfort is the only way to create space for your justice to move over the earth.*

In this moment of quiet, we listen carefully for what's up. Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight, you who are rock and redeemer of us all. Amen.

This passage is one which can be difficult to grasp. For the first time in the gospel of Mark, Jesus speaks about the reality of suffering involved with following his path. Though Peter tries to manage the truth, Jesus wasn't having any of it. Life is hard, not fair for so many, and the message is clear for the followers of Jesus... we have the power to take up the cause of justice and help make the world a better place. It might not be easy, but it creates bonds that last.

Anyone ever participate on a team – like baseball, softball, basketball, debate, trivia, field hockey, lacrosse, a drama production, or an honors choir, etc? Being part of a team involves certain commitments: 1) show up (you gotta be a participant); 2) listen up [willingness to follow direction (round the bases in this direction)]; 3) put out (your best effort); 4) shout out (support other team members)

These four qualities make for a committed teammate and a very functional team.

Following Jesus requires these same qualities. Jesus needed his disciples and the crowd to know what it means to truly follow him. It means doing things in his way. Jesus would have known what it meant to “undergo great suffering.” Before this passage, in chapter 6, Jesus learned of the gruesome death of his cousin, John the Baptist. Perhaps the rebuke of Peter was fueled by the urgency of this sign that Jesus’ time was drawing closer and there was much work to do.

So the tension is in ‘letting go’/deny myself of an old way (habit) so that I ‘take up’ a new thing. To be a really good ball player, I had to throw and catch a lot of balls off the roof. To be a better guitar player I had to play a lot of hours so I could support the Praise Team. I also had to set time to practice with the ball team; I had to rearrange my schedule so I could be present at Praise Team rehearsal.

Jesus’ invitation to “take up (your) cross” is an invitation not to be too far removed from suffering or pain. A life of discipleship — of following Jesus — would consist of moments of joy, as well as times of hardship and the weight of sorrow.

When do we need to carry the weight, and when do we need to release it?

Jesus released the weight of Peter’s rebuke, but he also encouraged us to take on the weight of the cross. Even as we take up causes of justice and compassion in our discipleship, we have to remember that we can’t only focus on hardship. Sometimes we have to let the weight go.

We have to let the weight of self-loathing go, as well as the weight of unreasonable expectations. We must release those things we keep telling ourselves that lead us to believe in our unworthiness. We must let go of the lies we keep believing that prevent us from living the life God has created for us.

When we let go, we will have the strength to take up the cross (the mission) Jesus invites us to carry.

Response to the Word –**Pastor Pat**

Let's join together in a response to the Word - For Living without Control

Public theologian *Kate Bowler shares a prayer* for times when we aren't sure of our next move.

She writes:

I had a very tender podcast conversation with theologian and ethicist Stanley Hauerwas. We have worked together for almost two decades now, and I rely on him to be incredibly certain about what makes a life good and virtuous.... After describing how many twists and turns that life had taken, he had come to a conclusion: “The ability to live well is the ability to live without so many certainties.”

We will have to develop a high tolerance for having so little control and so few bedrock assumptions. So let's ask our God to “unplan” our days a little and help us live that way.

God, I come to you as I am. It is all I have, really.
And the next one I'm conscious of will be the same.
I can feel the way I move, moment to moment,
without the comfort of “solutions.”

It seems wild to me now how I imagined
any once-and-for-all cure for this,
or a master plan to ensure things will work out.
But, truth be told, that's always been my secret hope.

So, Lord, let's try again.
I'm begging for a new plan. I want a plan that is an “unplan.”
I must keep moving and planning, trying and changing,
knitting my days together even as they unravel.
So can we do this together?

Remind me to pray: come Lord and quiet the worry.
I step, and you steady me.
I give, and you keep my hands open.
I act, and you fortify me with courage to try and try and try again.

This life is uncertain, Lord, but your love is not.
You tell the story of my life regardless of how little I know
about how it ends, except to say, you were there since the beginning
and you appear on every page.

Reflection Prompt

Now that we know that we don't know, let's enjoy that thought for a moment. Isn't it delicious that the God who flung stars into space also knows every beginning and end? So let's settle in for a moment and let ourselves *not know* in the presence of the God who already knows.

Center for Action and Contemplation <meditations@cac.org> Life as a Spiritual Journey: Weekly Summary. February 24, 2024.

May it be so. Amen.

Now, Let us look to **Maryanne Espenshade** who will lead us in the prayer for God's people, the Lord's Prayer and we'll hear the offertory hymn.