

**Sunday 21 March 2021
Glynde Lutheran Church
Sermon on Mark 8:31 – 38**

Theme: “Being a cross bearer”

“That people may seek God’s forgiveness for failing to be cross-bearers, and ask for strength to be cross-bearers”

Introduction:

Do you wear a cross around your neck? I don’t, but I know many people who do, *both female and male*.... My wife Jenine, for example, always wears a cross around her neck....

Why do people wear crosses around their neck? Well, the cross reminds us of three things, *as you can see from this laminated sheet that I had made up, and have stuck on the side of one of my filing cabinets in my office.* The cross of Jesus reminds us:

- * How much God loves us
“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that whoever believes in him may not be lost but have eternal life (John 3:16)

- * That Jesus died “for our sins”
“I passed on to you what I received, which is of the greatest importance: that Christ died for our sins”, as written in Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3)

- * How God wants us to live our life
“If anyone wants to come with me, he must forget self, carry his cross, and follow me” (Mark 8:34)

This third point is our focus for today, that the cross of Jesus points us to the way that God wants you and me to live our life: as people who deny ourselves, carry our cross, *and in this way* follow Jesus.

Part 1: An explanation of...

So what does it mean to be a “cross-bearer”, someone who carries a cross? Let’s look at our Bible reading for this morning...

Our Bible reading comes ‘slap-bang’ right in the middle of Mark’s Gospel. The first half as we saw last week leads up to Jesus asking his disciples “Who do you say I am?”

And remember that last week that I pointed out that Peter has seen all the miracles that Jesus has done, and has correctly come to the conclusion that Jesus is God's promised King, *the One promised in the Old Testament* (Harry Wendt, STS 34).

Remember, the Old Testament prophets looked forward to the day when there would be divine revolution, when the whole world would be at peace again with God and under the rulership of His King.

When that day came, the prophet Isaiah writes:

**The blind will be able to see
and the deaf will hear.**

**The lame will leap and dance,
and those who cannot speak will shout for joy**
(*Isa. 35:5-6; cf. Matthew 11:3-6*).

And that's what happens when Jesus comes on the scene. Pastor Harry Wendt's slide pictures the fact that the miracles of Jesus are signs pointing to who Jesus is:

- * **His miracles over sickness** *including enabling the paralysed to walk, the deaf to hear, and the blind to see*
(*Mark 2:1-12; 7:31-37; 8:22-25*).
- * **His miracles over nature**, *including his stilling of the storm on Lake Galilee* (*Mark 4:35-41*).
- * **His miracles over demons**, *including the demonic man over on the Eastern side of Lake Galilee* (*Mark 5:1-20*)
- * **His miracles over death**, *including his raising of Jairus' daughter from death back to life* (*Mark 5:21-43*).

So on the basis of the evidence, *of what Peter has experienced and seen with his own eyes*, Peter confesses that Jesus is God's promised King.

Jesus asks Peter:

"What about you? Who do you say I am?" (v. 29a).

And Peter responds:

"You are the Messiah, God's promised King" (v. 29b).

It's clear, though, from what happens immediately after Peter's confession that Jesus is "the Messiah", that the disciples really haven't got much idea as

to what sort of Messiah, *King*, Jesus is. They apparently had the common notion at the time that the Messiah would be an earthly ruler for God, and that his rule would bring wealth and power and political freedom for the God's people, *the Jewish people* (STS 33, p. 69).

So Jesus had to teach his disciples what sort of Messiah, *King*, he was, and what the Messianic Age, *the age of God's rulership*, would mean for those who allowed God to rule in their hearts and minds.

Listen to what Jesus said to his disciples.... Mark tells us:

Then Jesus began to teach his disciples:

“The Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the Law. He will be put to death, but three days later he will rise to life”. Jesus made this very clear to them... (Mark 8:31).

And how does Peter respond? Well, what Jesus says to him seems to him to be utterly incredible and totally unbelievable. Mark tells us what happened:

So Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But Jesus turned around, looked at his disciples, and rebuked Peter. “Get away from me, Satan”, he said. “Your thoughts don't come from God, but from man!” (Mark 8:32).

Jesus reacts sternly to Peter, and even calls him “Satan”. Why? Because Peter is putting into words the temptation from Satan that Jesus had to fight against all his life: that of taking the easy way out, and of setting up God's rule by force (*cf. Matt. 4:1-11; 26:53*).

But then people would have been forced to submit to God's rule, and forced to do God's will.... And that wasn't God's way!!

The song that we just sang, “Low the way is low”, has a verse in it that summarises this temptation by Satan that Jesus had through Peter, & it summarises too Jesus' reaction to it:

**See the glory road –
he was tempted by it too.
But he set his course
with Jerusalem in view (LHS 857 v. 2).**

So after accepting the disciples' confession of him as “the Messiah”, that is, God's King, Jesus goes on to explain to them just what sort of King he is, a

King who will suffer and die to set up God's Kingdom (*cf. Mark 10:45*). And then he goes on to explain to them what being a part of God's Kingdom will mean to them.

Mark tells us:

Then Jesus called the crowd and his disciples to him. "If anyone wants to come with me", he told them, "he must forget self, carry his cross, and follow me. For whoever wants to save his own life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it..." (*Mark 8:34-35*).

And this is where it starts getting relevant and personal for us. In the Good News Bible, there is a drawing of what Jesus is saying here (*slide of drawing illustrating Mark 8:34*). Jesus is saying to us too today:

"Look I call you to be a cross-bearer just like I was!"

Now Jesus doesn't mean that we are to put up with the cross of hard times or suffering, or the cross of an irritable husband or a cantankerous wife.... Being a Christian may mean this, but this isn't what Jesus means (*Addendum 1*).

What Jesus meant *when he said we are to be cross-bearers* is something that we can only understand when we understand what it meant to carry a cross in Jesus' day. Those who were carrying a cross, *well actually the cross-bearer of the cross*, were people who were on the way to the place of their execution. That's who carried crosses in Jesus' day: people who were on the way to their death, *people who were, from every practical point of view, dead* (*cf. the movie, "Dead man walking"*).

Jesus is saying in effect:

"Look, I call you want to come with me, if you want to live in God's Kingdom under His rule, you have to be a cross-bearer, that is, someone who from every practical point of view dead, dead to living life for yourself".

Jesus calls us to be people who are dead to self and alive to serving others!!

That this is what Jesus means when he says that we are to carry a cross is clear from the other two things that he says to the crowd and his disciples. Jesus says that following him involves not only carrying a cross, but also denying oneself and losing our life for his sake, and the sake of the Gospel (*v. 34, 35*).

To deny ourself is to say “no” to the desires and appetites of self and to instead serve others. To lose our life for Jesus’ sake, and for the gospel’s sake means giving up our earthly aims and ambitions in order to serve others *for Jesus’ sake*.

So by drawing this picture, *the picture in the Good News Bible*, the artist who draw this is reminding us of the sort of people that Jesus calls us to be: people who are *from every practical point of view* dead so far as living life for oneself is concerned. We are people who are called to live not for ourselves, but rather for others, in all that we do.

Part 2: The necessity of...

And, you know, this isn’t an optional part of being a Christian. Being a cross bearer, *that is, living life not for self but rather for others as Jesus did*, this is part of parcel of being a Christian. You can’t be a Christian and not be a cross-bearer....

Often, though, I think that we push this picture of us being cross-bearers out of your mind, and instead focus on us wearing a crown as we hold onto Jesus’ hand. Not that it’s wrong to focus on the picture of us wearing a crown as we hold onto Jesus’ hand!! Indeed, this is what the Good News of the Christian faith is all about!!

But the two pictures go together.... In fact, “you can’t have one without the other”. Remember how that old song goes:

**“Love and marriage
go together like a horse and carriage
you can’t have one without the other”**

And it’s the same with being a Christian, *a follower of Jesus*. You can’t have the crown without the cross.... Charles Spurgeon, the great Baptist preacher of the 19th Century, knew this only too well.

That’s why he could write:

“There are no crown-wearers in Heaven that were not cross-bearers here below” (*Encyclopedia of 7700 illustrations, no 998*).

Wearing a crown and bearing a cross go hand in hand.

Every Christian is both a Barrabas and a Simon of Cyrene (*Stott, Cross of Christ, p. 278*). We are a Barrabas in that like him we escape the suffering and the death that we justly deserve, *not because of any worthiness in us, but because Jesus suffered and died in our stead....*

But we are each a Simon of Cyrene, too, in that we are each also cross-bearers, *though this parallel breaks down of course in that Simon of Cyrene wasn't on the way to his execution, although the people watching would probably have assumed so....*

None of us can simply be just a Barrabas. We who are followers of Jesus are *both* a Barrabas and a Simon of Cyrene.

Juan Carlos Ortiz, a South American evangelist, laments in his book *Disciple* that many of us often want Jesus as Saviour and not Jesus as Lord. He writes:

Our modern gospel is what I call the Fifth Gospel. We have the Gospel according to Saint Matthew, the Gospel according to Saint Mark, the Gospel according to Saint Mark, the Gospel according to Saint John, and the Gospel according to the Saint Evangelicals.

The Gospel according to the Saint Evangelicals is taken from verses here and there in the other four Gospels. We take all the verses we like, all that verses that offer something or promise something – John 3:16, John 5:24, and so forth – and we make a systematic theology from these verses, while we forget the other verses that present the demands of Jesus Christ.

Who authorized that? Who said *that* we are allowed to present only one side of Jesus? Suppose there is a wedding, and when it's time for the vows, the man says, "Pastor, I accept this woman as my personal cook". Or "as my personal dishwasher"....

The woman would say, "Wait a minute! Yes, I'm going to cook. Yes, I'm going to clean the house. But I'm not a maid – I'm going to be your wife. You have to give me your love, your heart, your home..., everything".

The same is true with Jesus. He is our Saviour and Healer, true. But we cannot cut Jesus Christ into pieces and take only the piece we like best (p. 15-16).

We can't cut Jesus into pieces and take only Jesus as Saviour. If we want Jesus as Saviour, we have to take Jesus as Lord.

If we want the crown, we have to realise that the cross goes with it.

What does Jesus say at the end of our Bible reading?:

“If a person is ashamed of me and my teaching in this godless and wicked day, then the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels” (Mark 8:38).

Jesus is saying in effect:

“Look, if you won’t accept these words of mine and turn your back on living your life for others, then I’ll turn my back on you!”

...Stern words, words which stop and make us think....

Conclusion:

Just before this message, we sang one of Robin Mann’s songs, *one of his best ones, I think*. The words of this song summarise what Jesus is saying to his disciples *and to us* in our Bible reading for today. Let me finish off by reading them to you, and then we’ll have a short prayer. Robin Mann writes:

**Low the way is low,
with the man whom angels praise;
he who spoke the sky
was a baby dressed in hay....**

**See the glory road –
he was tempted by it too.
But he set his course
with Jerusalem in view....**

**When our time is gone
We will see the great new day.
Till that day appears,
All we know is Jesus’ way...**

**We are companions of
the one whose name is love,
we share his life as we grow.
we carry Jesus’ death
with each and every breath –
our hope is high, the way is low (SLH #857).**

Prayer:

Dear Father,

Forgive us for the times that we've lived life for ourselves and not for others. Forgive us for the times when we have focussed on what we can get for ourselves, rather than on what we can give to others.

And Father, fill us with your Spirit, with the same Spirit who filled Jesus, so that in all the we do, we may be conscious of the fact that you want us to be servants of others as Jesus was and is.

In his name, and through him, we pray.

Amen.

Addendum 1

First, “to take up one’s cross” does not mean to put up with some relatively minor irritant, like a crabby in-law or a runny nose. Crucifixion was the form of execution reserved for the most despised and evil of criminals. No Roman citizen could be crucified without the sanction of the emperor; that form of death was reserved for slaves and non-citizens.

After the sentence was passed, the victim was scourged with the most severe of the three Roman levels of beating, and then the cross-member was lashed to his arms and shoulders so that he could carry it out to the place of execution. There the cross-member was fastened to the upright member of the cross, already sunk in the ground. Thus, for someone to “take up his cross” was to go to the place of painful, shameful execution.

To use that expression in a metaphorical sense is not to strip it of its force. Jesus means that his followers must die to self-interest, declare themselves dead to the glories and attractions in this world, and be prepared for suffering, even the most ignominious suffering (*D.A. Carson, How Long, O Lord?, p. 83*).