



Meditation for the Second Sunday in Lent
February 28, 2021

If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

[Mark 8:34]

This exhortation by Jesus is so familiar that we may have stopped paying attention to it. We might roll our eyes, thinking that we could never do what Jesus asks. In doing so, we turn away from the possibilities that he holds before us over and over again when he promises that we can have the same relationship with God that he has and that we too have the powers to heal and to forgive.

Jesus' disciples were just as flabbergasted by Jesus' words. Following up on Peter's affirmation that Jesus is indeed the Messiah. (Mark 8:29) this passage marks the moment when we learn exactly how the world was changed by the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus. In these words, Jesus turns upside down every expectation about the Messiah. In doing so he challenges every expectation about an omnipotent God. He reveals a God whose love is a free gift, not a reward to be earned. He reveals a God who creates and transforms in partnership with us, rather than imposing choices on us. He reveals a God who will not be manipulated into doing what we want and will not prevent suffering, but who walks with us at all times and in all places, even in the depths of shame and humiliation that the cross represented.

Jesus' call to take up our cross and follow him is a promise that we will never be alone.

This meditation on community by Steven Charleston is another way of understanding Jesus' call:

We will walk together through this lonely stretch of road, all of us who have come this far into the valley of shadows. We will not be afraid or anxious, for we have one another. We have our shared strength, our common wisdom, and our collective memory to help us through whatever may come. We have the quiet counsel of our elders and the boundless energy of our young ones. We have the depth of faith of many courageous hearts. We have the resilience and experience of all those among us who have passed this way before. And when the going gets hard, we have a thousand voices to sing, singing as we go along the twisted path toward higher ground, where the shadows will be far behind us.

Ladder to the Light, p. 76-77