



Sunday after the Exaltation of the Cross

In today's Gospel lesson, Jesus says that if someone wants to follow him, that person must forget themselves, take up their cross, and follow him. The cross, at the time of Jesus, was a shameful way to die. It means you were a criminal and didn't even deserve a dignified execution. Yet, Jesus asks us to embrace this shame. But how do we do this? According to Jesus, it has to do with radical love (even of our enemies) and radical forgiveness (no matter what). We do this by setting aside our own pride and greed. In short, it means losing to those around us. Contrast this with what society tells us: put yourself first and win at any cost. Because you'll look foolish in the eyes of society by living this way, picking up our cross often feels like you are losing your life, but, in actuality, it's "saving your life."

Scripture: Mark 8:34-38; 9:1

Bottom Line: With the cross . . . losing is winning!

Discussion Questions

1. If the Christian way of life is the way of the cross, is there room for triumphalism (whether of one's faith, accomplishments, culture, or history)? What might be a healthier approach?
2. Jesus talks about being ashamed of the cross. Are there aspects of the gospel that you're ashamed of? What are they? How might you embrace them?
3. In what areas of your life did you need to pick up your cross and follow Jesus? How will you seek to be transformed by the cross and live a new sort of way?

Moving Forward

Jesus, by dying on the cross, set the pattern for our lives (see Philippians 2:5-11). Jesus didn't assert his will on us. Instead, he gave us an example of how to radically love our neighbor: die for them! Yet how often— whether at home, at work, at school, or at church—do we demand to have things "our way"? How many arguments, divisions, and hurt feelings happen because of our ego and pride? Now, imagine, what would the world look like if everyone was willing to "lose" through love to their neighbor? What's stopping you from living this radical new way—the way of the gospel—starting right now?

Changing Your Mind

"Jesus 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.'" (Mark 8:34)