

“User-friendly Christianity”

Or “Taking up One’s Cross to Follow Christ”

Sermon notes by the Rev. Arnold A. Bush, Priest in Charge,
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Text: MK 8:32ff Jesus said to Peter, “Get behind me Satan! You are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things. Jesus said, “If any want to be my followers, let them (1) DENY THEMSELVES, and (2) TAKE UP THEIR CROSS and (3) FOLLOW ME.”

Purpose: How user-friendly culture tends to produce “armchair-take-it easy-low risk Christianity” instead of followers of Christ acting daily to deny themselves in order to serve others.

I. Introduction of three experiences and themes

(1) Ever watch a high school ROTC practice marching or a band march in a parade? All are in step to a cadence or tempo. They are following a pattern established in procedures for marching. They are following an appointed leader.

(2) Ever been to a festive party with music, cocktails, and dancing, but called to the hospital to see a friend or relative? “‘Take up a cross’ is an **volitional decision**, not a handicap or illness you carry.” A choice one makes; of one’s own choosing! Not coming down with a terrible disease.

(3) What do you possess? Running water, electric power, indoor toilets, high speed Internet connection, wireless connection, iPod, Blackberry, GPS in your car? Three meals a day? Pain medication for arthritis and minor pain? Which of these comforts would you be willing to deny yourself? A mission trip to Central America?

The scripture (MK 8:32).

This is a **sandpaper statement** of Jesus: Followers are to deny themselves and take up their cross daily, and follow me. Some would say this is “hogwash.” It is **going against the TIDE, THE CULTURE**. Not an anti-University of Alabama fan. It is swimming with or against the ocean tide.

II. Examples of user-friendly attitudes and culture

(A) **Voting machines**, computer software, Sandy Sanson or TV car selling, electric flushing toilets or faucets;

(B) User-friendly high school or **college**: no discipline to learn; new business attire, diet; if it requires effort and learning it is not a good machine; if it requires instructions and is complicated, it is worthless; **no tolerance for delayed gratification**; impatience in fast food, long lines in supermarket, etc.; in our economy resist downsizing, de-accumulation, less spending and less traveling, etc.

III. Jesus redefines his kingdom in Caesarea Philippi

Jesus lived around the NW quadrant of the Sea of Galilee but moved North on an R and R. What are folks saying about me? What’s the gossip? Peter says you are the Messiah!! Jesus is moving from: *Cozy fellowship to...Betrayal, persecution; Galilee Christians... Jerusalem Christians; Holding hands singing to.... Marching in an angry crowd; Fireside chats... Much suffering.* Where do you want to be? Not a follower, but go your own way.

Not daily taking up a cross, but doing only what I feel like doing. Not a lifestyle of self-denial, but **instant gratification**. Stay in a cozy warm fellowship, not confront others or publicly express my convictions. In short, in this passage Jesus does not seem to be into DELAYED GRATIFICATION. This is the “Road Less Traveled” (see Scott Peck’s book).

IV. To become a follower of Christ

A follower is under the instructions and directions of the leader. A follower listens for directions and watches where the leader is walking. (E.g., ROTC at a local high school, Law

Enforcement Academies for ATF agents, FBI, Police, training.) This is a STEP-BY-STEP action on our part. **“To follow is in the personal imperative tense. To follow requires the doing of an action, habitually, moment by moment.”** I am alongside Jesus. We are moving from “cultural Christians” in Elmore County to be devoted followers of Jesus Christ. In our society many are “good Christians” in name only. They pay taxes, do not steal or cheat, but are never attempting to receive any directions in a daily walk with the Living Christ. Are you willing to be step by step with Jesus?

V. To take up your cross daily

To take up your cross daily is often understood as experiencing some type of suffering. For example, if you are injured in a car accident on I-85 or I-65 in Alabama and taken to the UAB Hospital to be treated for excessive injuries for several months. This is not a cross to bear. **They did not choose to be injured.** For example, an Episcopalian is on a mission trip to Honduras when the bus carrying the team wrecks. One is hospitalized a month. This is a cross to bear. A missionary in Africa contracts malaria while serving; there is a long rehabilitation. This is a cross to bear. Your son has an injury requiring several months of rehabilitation, you choose to take care of him. You are a whistle blower in an industry in Central Alabama that is emitting toxic waste into the air and toxic chemicals are polluting a river, killing many fish and endangering the drinking water. You lose your job because you are a whistle blower reporting to the Environmental Protection Agency. This is a cross to bear. The verb is very clear, **“we choose to take up our cross.”** **Recalling last week’s sermon about the Park Bench, weekly and daily we are to return to the Park Bench where Jesus renews us with the power of His Holy Spirit.**

VI. Deny yourself daily

The verb tense is *aorist*, meaning one is entering into a new state of mind or a condition. *Aorist* is in the present tense. To deny is a practice in everyday life. **To deny** is to lose one’s own interest, to forget about one’s own interest and consider the needs or interests of another person. **To deny is to place the needs of another person above your interest. (Parenting)**

For example, a good salesperson shifts their attention from their needs to the needs, concerns, request of the customer. A good salesperson places their agendas on the shelf in order to listen to the needs and wants of the customer.

For example, I am a **member of Epiphany**, worshipping every Sunday. If I know someone in the Tallassee jail, or confined to the local hospital, I deny myself a pleasure in order to visit that person. I am a person who has tasks to complete, recreational needs and responsibilities, **but I choose to place my needs on the shelf in order to make a visit to the jail or hospital.** Then I am denying satisfying my own needs.

For example, **a stranger walks into Church of the Epiphany.** I am enjoying visiting with one of my good friends this Sunday morning, but I notice this guest. I deny my needs for conversations with dear friends in the congregation by spending a few minutes with the visitor and invite them to have lunch with me at one of the finer fast food restaurants. (In Niceville, the singles could spot the single adults and invite them for lunch. I spent many lunches Sundays at the Pizza Hut in Niceville.)

For example, **what are the criteria for a 16-year-old** to serve on the staff of a Happening Weekend for Teens? During the Happening Weekend, can a 16-year-old deny their own desires and needs from Friday through Saturday to listen and develop healthy relationships with those going through the Happening? Some are not mature enough to place their needs on the shelf for neither a Happening nor a Cursillo. For example, at Agape Meal on Maundy Thursday at a table of 6-7, no one is allowed to serve themselves. This makes some members uncomfortable.

VII. Themes of denial and benefits of self-denial

Baptism: page 302, “I will renounce sinful (fleshy) desires that draw me from the love of God.” Page 303, “I will follow and obey him as my Lord.”

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A study at the University of Michigan in the *Harvard Business Review* (University of Vancouver) indicates that those who choose to help others in volunteer settings find life more meaningful and live longer.

Your VOLITION is a gift from God. Choose to follow him step by step. Our culture is infecting us with a virus of IMPATIENCE. This week look in the mirror. You are child of the King. You choose to be a follower of Christ.