

Suffering with Jesus

Mark 8:27—38

Introduction

One of the pictures of Messiah in *Isaiah* is the Suffering Servant. The word “passion” means “suffering.” There is a route in Jerusalem from the former Antonia Fortress to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, that is a place of Christian pilgrimage, called the *Via Dolorosa*, the Way of Suffering. Jesus’ road to the cross was a road of suffering. If we are to follow Jesus through His passion to the cross, we are called to suffer with Him.

Mortification of the Flesh

The problem is that we have a natural aversion to suffering. In fact, if someone likes suffering, we have a psychological term for that—masochism. It is a psychological abnormality. Jesus isn’t saying we must like pain to be able to follow Him. What we’re talking about is the *mortification of the flesh*. Some Christians over the years have practiced self-flagellation to do this. But Luther was clear that this is not the mortification of the flesh Jesus is talking about. Mortification of the flesh takes place in everyday life. It begins with denying ourselves. Jesus says in **verse 34 of Mark 8**, *“If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.”*

“Deny Himself”

Denying ourselves is following the First Commandment. Our fallen human nature listens to the voice of the devil in the garden, *“If you eat of the fruit of the tree ... you will be like God” (Genesis 3:5)*. Our fallen nature wants to be God; it wants to be in control. To deny ourselves is to deny our human nature and its desire to have pre-eminence in our life. This makes everything so much easier when we aren’t always “looking out for #1.” So, the first step is to let go of control.

“Take up His Cross”

We let go of something to be able to pick something else up. We let go of control to be able to pick up our cross. We don’t want to understand this cross in the common sense. Usually, people think of whatever handicap they have in their lives as their “cross to bear.” It’s something that keeps them from living life to its fullest. But the cross wasn’t something that held Jesus back, that prevented Him from having a full life. It was His mission in life. One way we pick up our cross is to remember our Baptism. The **Small Catechism** asks the question: *What does such baptizing with water indicate?* The answer is: *It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.* We pick up our cross by crucifying the Old Adam every day to live a new life before God.

“Follow Me”

Once we’ve let go of control and have taken up our cross by crucifying the Old Adam, we are ready to follow Jesus. To follow Jesus is to walk where He walked, to live like He lived. We learn how to

live by reading and studying God's Word. Of course, following Jesus is a hard task. The thing is, whenever Jesus gives us a task to do, He enables us to do it.

His Yoke

(Read **Matthew 11:28–30**). Following Jesus may be hard, but He gives us the strength to see it through. One plus about surrendering control and taking up our cross, it takes away all the unnecessary responsibility we are saddled with all the time. That's why Jesus' yoke is easy, and His burden is light.

Word and Sacrament

We take His yoke upon ourselves in Word and Sacrament. In hearing the Word and receiving the body and blood of Christ, we let go of our control, submitting to Him. Then, we pick up our cross by crucifying the Old Adam, to be able to follow Jesus. Let us continue to prepare to follow Him and suffer with Him through His passion to the cross.

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
