



The Cost of Following

1st Saturday in Lent

Mark 8:34-9:1

He 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. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.' And he said to them, 'Truly I tell you, there

are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.'

Having declared himself to his disciples, Jesus now challenges them and others who followed him with the cost of discipleship. What he lays out is enough to make even the most ardent followers consider turning away. Jesus never minces the terms of discipleship. Then and now, they are all-encompassing. *If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.*

Though we are often inclined to understand self-denial as a matter of giving up some thing or practice, the self-denial to which Jesus calls us reaches to the very core of our being. It is to place ourselves at Jesus' disposal to be shaped after his own image and to be employed in his service. By the same token, the summons to take up the cross does not mean quietly bearing some burden that has been thrust upon us by circumstances beyond our control, but the assumption of some burden, some pain, or some need of another which we could just as easily have left untaken. Either way, whether the cross is taken up or placed upon our shoulders by the circumstances of our lives, it is the attitude with which we bear it that makes it a service after the example of Jesus.

The paradox of the Christian life is that we only gain life as we are willing to let go of our control over it and give it in the service of others in the name of Jesus.

Prayer: *"Take up your cross," the Savior said, "If you would my disciple be; forsake the past, and come this day, and humbly follow after me." Take up your cross; let not its weight pervade your soul with vain alarm; His strength shall bear your spirit up, sustain your heart, and nerve your arm.*

Charles W. Everest (1814-1877)