

Re-Opening To Divine Presence:

*"Take Up Your 'Re-spond-s-able-ities'
...and Wisely Follow Me!"*

Mark 8:27-38, James 3:1-13

September 16, 2018

You know...I'm thinking...at least it's true for me...

The only crosses most of us carry are on gold chains around our necks.

But try substituting the word "responsibility" for "cross" in Jesus invitation.

"Take up your responsibilities and follow me."

We are much more likely to be carrying around our responsibilities....the heavy, weighing us down, serious ones.

We all know a lot about "responsibilities".

In my holy imagination, I can see us, responsibilities laden upon our backs, following Jesus down the road.

What if in our following Jesus, He paused long enough for you to catch up to Him.

What do you think Jesus would say about the things you see as your responsibilities?

I wonder if Jesus sees our responsibilities the way we do.

I wonder if Jesus wants us to be responsible in a different way.

Each morning as I wake up,
what do I see as my responsibility?

...to be to work on time, to work enough hours to earn the pay I need to make to pay the rent no matter what?

...to feel responsible for the way someone else feels physically or emotionally?

...to just take the tongue lashing from the partner, boss, passer-by?

...to finish everything before I leave, to work till I'm so tired I can hardly drive home?

...to fix dinner and help with homework and be pleasant and finish up odds and ends and go to bed to start the next day all over again?

Is this what Jesus says is my responsibility?

Sure feels like a cross!

We usually think the cross we carry is our obligation to our jobs and families, the hardships we have to endure,

the sadness of the world, our losses which outweigh our gains, our hours worked vs. our hours of play,

the injustices or the short hands we've been dealt.

We usually think of our crosses as those things we have to endure that are joyless.

AND maybe we think this because...

Most folks have misinterpreted today's wisdom teaching and misunderstand the notion of Jesus' suffering and the role of suffering in following Jesus. We often hear:

It is your cross to bear.

Suffer your way through.

God never gives you more than you can handle...grin and bear it!

Don't worry. You'll receive your reward in the life to come.or such words as these.

Too many suffering people in the world hear this terrible distortion of what Jesus said....

people living in poverty, violence, illness, or loss.....

you've heard it when you lost your job, your loved one, when you faced hard financial times...you hear it when people are at a loss for words...

and are trying to make sense of injustice...or avoid it!

But this does not reflect the wisdom in the teaching.

Suffering is not a sign of faithfulness. Compassion is!

BTW, there is a difference between carrying a cross vs. having a chip on your shoulder??

Know how to tell the difference?

A chip is all about and only about you!

A cross is a focus beyond the self, including the self, but beyond it to the greater good of all.

So, let's regroup!

When Jesus got up each day, I wonder what he saw as his responsibility.

What do the stories tell us?

To reach out to those everyone else judged and no one listened to....to listen and touch.

To talk to the people and offer another view of life.

Not to be afraid of the tough stuff and the power players, but to do right by those around him
treating them the way the Divine Lover would have us all be treated.

To forgive. To free people up to be different.
Yeah...to forgive.

He spoke the truth in kindness without gossip or malice and he forgave people their humanness offering them another chance at life.

We all know this.

So, why is it so hard to pick up “that” cross...vs the ones we usually do?
Why do we choose to spend so much energy worrying about what will happen next and regretting what has already happened and miss living in the moment?

Why do we spend so much emotional energy putting up fronts instead of letting people love us the way we really are?

Don't we trust people to be loving?
Is that your take on people?
Is that how people experience you?

Why do we make everyone else's business our business
and why do we hold ourselves accountable for the way others feel about what's happening?

And why do we think the things our families want most from us are a house and a car
and a vacation? Why?

Because we've fallen for the culture's ways instead of the Ways of Jesus, and to change that...
would mean we'd have to change!

If we asked Jesus, what would Jesus say we are responsible to do?

You know they did ask him and there was only thing Jesus ever says explicitly we are responsible to do is:

Love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and might and our neighbor as ourselves.
This is our responsibility. “This” is our cross.

Carrying this is the way to be saved...not only for eternal life but as the way to make it through the pressures of this life.

He never speaks of responsibility the way we think of it in this modern world.

For him responsibility is relational.....
the only commandment he gives us isn't about work or play or enduring or providing or suffering or even praying....
it's about love relationship.

Jesus says our responsibility is to love (and maybe given James' teachings, our tongues are the biggest obstacle to loving!).

We do know a lot about responsibilities and about crosses.

On your bulletin, make the shape of a cross.

In each quadrant, write down one burden, one responsibility, you have been carrying around...whether it be related to work or family....emotional or physical.

Lay down this cross.

Next to it. Draw another.

In each quadrant, write down one thing you'd much rather be responsible for...that you really have the power to be responsible for....
like smiling, holding your tongue, sharing your time, giving yourself or your possessions, being understanding.

The re-sets, re-adjusts, re-starts, re-focus you long for!

We have the wisdom to know the difference between these two crosses.

We decide what to pick up and who to follow.

We tell Satan, temptation, to get behind us....or not!

We do have to face our worldly responsibilities.
There are no short cuts.

It's just that we have to be sure we are addressing our real responsibilities.

Face your responsibilities and your blessings.

Responsibility: your ability to respond to your life and the world around you in life-giving ways!

There is joy and the fullness of life each day...this is what we can expect.

This is what God gives each of us.

What is the cross Jesus is inviting you to pick up and carry?

It's not a burden but a privilege.....with a cost for sure...

for people are not used to

someone who is kind and loving and interested!

As you go into the coming week, consider the question Jesus asked his disciples:

"Who do you say that I am?"

And importantly think on this:

Who would Jesus say **you** are?

Don't jump to conclusions, but let the answer come to you through reflection and prayer.

You may be surprised and freed by the answer to who

Jesus says you are!

Do your actions reflect your answer?

Your answer is at the core of your faith and it will give direction to your life and to your Christian witness in the world....your true responsibility and cross.

Jesus doesn't expect us to be trailblazers,

but to follow in the steps he's already put down for us

that take us exactly where we all say we want to go (new life).

You are called to follow Jesus, one true act of love,

one step at a time.

re-mind, re-connect, re-invigorate, re-acquaint, re-move,

re-awaken, re-vive, re-frame, re-group,

re-pond, re-member, re-imagine....