

WEEKLY SERMON

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We all have a cross to bear!

A reflection on Mark 6:27

One of my favourite films is Selma, which records the campaign to secure equal voting rights via an epic march in Alabama from Selma to Montgomery in 1965, led by Martin Luther King and others civil rights leaders. The theme song offers a thought-provoking reflection describing the march to Selma in terms of glory.

The civil rights struggle was filled with confrontation and suffering, pain and sacrifice. Some lost their lives others were physically hurt and others unjustly imprisoned. And yet they sing of glory when reflecting on their struggle. Why?

Consider for a moment your own personal circumstances – the home you live in, your income ... be it from a pension or salary ... enabling you to do much of what you want; a secure and safe community life, family and friends. And if you're honest I guess you enjoy these givens and are happy for them to remain unaltered.

The challenge then to deny yourself and carry a cross, as spoken about in the reading from Mark's gospel, is possibly not that high on your agenda.

But this is the very thing that Jesus brings front and centre in his conversation with Peter. This is the very thing that characterizes Christian discipleship. This is the very thing that makes the difference in our lives - enabling us to sing 'glory' when going through suffering.

Whilst on the journey to Caesarea Philippi Jesus asks the question: "Who do people say I am?" Eventually Peter comes up with the answer: "You are the Messiah".

In theological terms, Peter's confession that Jesus is the Messiah is a foundational text in our understanding of Christology – the study of Jesus. It is this journey that broadens the disciples' perspectives, that gives them fresh insights into who Jesus is and that begins to reform them and prepare them for all that lies ahead – the journey to the cross.

It is this journey that teaches the disciples something about sovereignty and suffering; about self-denial and faithfulness; and ultimately about the establishment of God's Kingdom in all its fullness.

From Peter's perspective this talk of suffering and rejection and death did not conform to his understanding of God's coming Messiah. He had expected something a little more 'in your face'. But it is by Jesus' call, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me' that we are challenged most, and it is from that challenge that most of us still shrink.

HEALTHY CHURCHES TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES

Our calling as followers of Jesus is simply to make choices that usher in the Kingdom of God rather than make choices that hold it at bay. The more we can align ourselves with this calling, the more we will be able to sing 'glory' ourselves; no matter what we have to deny and what cross we have to bear.

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