

## *Follow the Leader*

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Mark 8: 27-38

FPC Uvalde

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As I read and re-read this text over the last couple of weeks, one question kept popping into my head. Where is that gentle Jesus I know and love? Where is my feel-good God that is the icing on my feel-good life?

What happened to the Jesus in that well known and loved hymn that says, “What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and grieves to bear?”

Well according to Mark, our Jesus is one that undergoes great suffering, a Christ that will be rejected and will be crucified. The portrait of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark is that of the suffering servant. We already know this to be true, don't we? We know the story of the week leading up to Jesus' death, and the agony he went through on the cross.

However, we sometimes get stuck on the Easter side of the cross. Don't get me wrong—I am all about Easter and living as Easter people, as I have heard us called before. We live in the light and salvation of this side of the cross.

That being said, however, being a follower of Jesus Christ—the Messiah, means *first* we must have an understanding of what it means for Jesus to be the Messiah. And, for Mark, it meant undergoing suffering and sacrifice—what happened on the other side of the cross from Easter.

Jesus tells us to follow him. –Not just to worship and adore him—which we do quite well, but to follow him. And in Jesus' words in this Gospel reading to follow Jesus means for us to deny ourselves, take up our crosses and follow him.

FOLLOW, Jesus said. Is that what we do here every Sunday? Do we call this a service of following, or a service of worship? We call this a service of worship, don't we? BUT—Jesus tells us to follow—not just worship. There is a huge difference between following and worshipping, isn't there?

Alan Kimber, a United Methodist minister said, “If the church truly worshipped, he didn’t think following would be a problem. The problem is that we seem to have defined the Messiah narrowly as “personal savior.” In other words, our worship becomes all about what Jesus can do for me.

Does that sound like “take up your cross and follow me?” Does that sound like “those who want to save their life will lose it?”

The role of a follower of Christ absolutely has to include some sacrifice—for the sake of Jesus Christ and the sake of the gospel.

How can we call ourselves followers—Christians, if we don’t attempt to live and act and be like the one whom we follow?

I read a story that demonstrates the kind of sacrifice I am talking about. I would like to read a letter written to Rev. Henry Brinton, a pastor, who also writes for the *Washington Post*.

Rev. Brinton got a letter in the mail, along with a money order for \$26.30, made out to his church. The letter said, “Dear Rev. Brinton ... I read a sermon of yours in *The Washington Post* ... You spoke of not playing it safe. Not to punt when it is a fourth-and-one situation and to keep striving. To keep striving — that really spoke to a need in my heart. It encouraged me, and the Lord spoke to me through your words. “I was laid off from my job at the end of October. There are many needs in my life, or so it seems. But what I desperately need more than anything is a closer walk with God.” “About two months ago, the Lord told me to write and send the tithe on my unemployment check. It’s taken that long—two months-- to obey and stop listening to the voice in my head telling me how pathetic I am, and obey the one in my heart telling me to obey” (Homiletics, Sept 2009).

The money order for \$26.30 was a tithe on an unemployment check. A down payment on a closer walk with God. A sacrifice, an act of self-denial, a response to the invitation of Jesus to take up the cross, and follow him. That’s what it means to faithfully be a follower and disciple of Jesus Christ.

It doesn’t always have to be about money, though. You may deny yourself your personal time, when you volunteer someplace. You may deny yourself a favorite vacation spot when you decide to go to the coast and help with disaster relief during your time off.

Taking up your cross will always involve some sort of selfless, sacrificial act on our part.

So where is our feel-good Jesus? Where is our friend Jesus who bears all our burdens and lightens our heavy loads? That same friend is still there, right at your side. But, that friend is calling to us today, to take up our cross, to lose our life and to **follow** him *in his way*.

To be a follower of Christ means to follow all parts of our Savior, not just the feel-good parts. That means we will be called on at times of our lives to sacrifice, to maybe suffer a bit or to experience persecution for the sake of the one who died for **us**—Jesus Christ, the Messiah—our Lord and Savior. Amen.