

The Cross You Carry **Luke 9:21-27**

(Minister walks in carrying a large cross)

Jesus said, *"If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me."*

Take up your cross daily. Now I want to give you some advice here. You don't want to do that! Or, at least, you don't want to do that until you think through what that means.

The idea is a little ridiculous anyway. Imagine having to get up every morning and picking up a cross. How would you get dressed? What would happen if you didn't have a matching outfit? You might need to buy a bigger car to take it to work with you. The GO train might charge you for two seats, one for you and one for your cross. Imagine the looks you'd get going through the Timmies drive-thru for your morning coffee with a large cross sticking out the window! You might even have to buy your cross a membership at Costco so it could get through the doors!

OK. Let's get serious. The trouble with what Jesus says is actually our picture of what carrying a cross means because of the images we have of a cross. We just can't imagine carrying a cross wherever we go!

So let's go back 2000 years to when Jesus talked about cross carrying. Trust me no-one wanted to carry a cross back then. If you were carrying a cross, you were on a one way trip to your own execution. The cross was a symbol of torture and death not a nice piece of jewellery.

Crucifixion was one of the most barbaric methods of execution the human race has ever come up with. The Romans were particularly good at it. It wasn't the nails that killed you. Most crucified people died of exhaustion, asphyxiation and dehydration.

And the weight of the cross was usually around 300 lbs, or for all you metric folk 136.08 kilograms. Usually the post of the cross was already in place on the hill of execution but the convicted person had to carry the cross beam and that could weigh up to 100 lbs. *"Take up your cross daily."* That physical act would simply be beyond a lot of us. If you think you have a bad back now, imagine what it would be like after carrying 100lbs, or 45.36 kilograms, over your shoulders every single day of your life.

Now personally I've another issue with carrying around a cross every day. I already have way too much other stuff that I carry around me – some of it

going back decades Stuff like guilt, envy, anger, failures, broken relationships, hurtful words, and broken promises. Even if I was going to take up my cross and carry it, I just couldn't do it. And even if it was possible, I'd need to lay down all the other stuff I'm carrying.

So Jesus what are you really saying to me? *"If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me. ²⁴ If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it."*

I must give up my own way? What does that mean? Well, since Scripture interprets Scripture, listen to Galatians 5:19-21 *"¹⁹ When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God."*

Wait a minute that sounds a lot like some of the "stuff" I am already carrying around with me. The stuff that is weighing me down. The stuff that clings tighter than Saran Wrap.

But listen to Jesus again. Matthew 11:28-29, *"Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls."*

Take my yoke upon you? You know what a yoke is, don't you? A yoke is a wooden beam normally used between a pair of oxen, or other animals, to enable them to pull together on a load when working in pairs. When you think about it, when you look at it, a yoke is a lot like the cross beam of a cross.

Jesus says we are to lay down our burdens because they are heavy and they are wearing us out. So he invites us to leave them at the foot of the cross where he nailed our sinful natures, where he died for all our sins, and to walk away as new creations filled with his Spirit, united with him, yoked to him. That's why we read in Second Corinthians 5:17, *"Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!"*

And so Galatians 5:22-25 says this, *"The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,*

faithfulness,²³ gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. ²⁵ Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives."

Now Jesus, I get all that. I am thankful for this new life you give me. This certainty of your presence with me. But how do I carry your cross daily. I'm not sure I get that yet? Let's go to Romans 6:3-5, "*Have you forgotten that when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined him in his death? ⁴ For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives. ⁵ Since we have been united with him in his death, we will also be raised to life as he was."*

Take up your cross daily. The cross as an instrument of death. The cross beam is like a yoke. Lay down your burdens. You are a new person in Christ. You are now filled and led with the Holy Spirit. You are joined to Jesus in baptism. Baptism. "*I baptize you with water in the name of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."* (From the baptismal liturgy)

I mark your forehead with the sign of the cross. The sign that you belong to me. This is the cross that you are to carry daily. It isn't big and cumbersome. It isn't a symbol of death, but a symbol of life. It's invisible to other people. But Jesus says to us, "I see it!" It tells me you are my disciple. That you are following me. And wherever you go – home, school, work, church, or community – I go with you because I live in you. Wherever you go, you are my ambassador. You are light to the world. You are change agents.

So through your words and actions, through your love and compassion, through mercy and forgiveness, through acts of love and kindness, through justice and reconciliation, let others see the cross you carry. And let them see it every day!

Pastoral Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
 You are faithful to us.
 May we always be faithful to you!
 You carried a cross for us.

Let us carry our cross for you.
You offer us your yoke.
Help us to lay our burdens down and to walk with you.
You wash away our sins in the waters of baptism.
Keep us true to you.

And in your name, as we go about our daily lives,
may the prayer attributed to St. Frances of Assisi be our prayer
and also the reality of our lives:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me bring love.
Where there is offense, let me bring pardon.
Where there is discord, let me bring union.
Where there is error, let me bring truth.
Where there is doubt, let me bring faith.
Where there is despair, let me bring hope.
Where there is darkness, let me bring your light.
Where there is sadness, let me bring joy.
O Master, let me not seek as much
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love,
for it is in giving that one receives,
it is in self-forgetting that one finds,
it is in pardoning that one is pardoned,
it is in dying that one is raised to eternal life. Amen.