

Gospel reflections: Second week of Lent

Mark 8:31-38

Jesus then began to teach his disciples. He taught them that the Son of Man must suffer many things. He taught them that the elders would not accept him. The chief priests and the teachers of the law would not accept him either. He must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke clearly about this. Peter took Jesus to one side and began to scold him.

Jesus turned and looked at his disciples. He scolded Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You are not thinking about the things God cares about. Instead, you are thinking only about the things humans care about."

Jesus called the crowd to him along with his disciples. He said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must say no to themselves. They must pick up their cross and follow me. Whoever wants to save their life will lose it. But whoever loses their life for me and for the good news will save it. What good is it if someone gains the whole world but loses their soul? Or what can anyone trade for their soul? Suppose anyone is ashamed of me and my words among these adulterous and sinful people. Then the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

The context for this passage is important. Up until now, Mark has retold a whirlwind of Jesus' activities. The disciples have witnessed a great deal of excitement, with crowds swarming around Jesus to listen to his great teaching, to witness and receive his healing. His followers have heard the kingdom of God announced and inaugurated in victorious tones. Everything they have seen Jesus do and heard him say has been impressive. The disciples are getting excited and they have big hopes of power and greatness.

Jesus, however, provides a stark contrast. He speaks clearly, foretelling his death and what it will mean to be one of his followers. Jesus will undergo rejection, suffering, and death and goes on to suggest that following him means giving of your own life as well. Jesus makes it clear that his way is not their way. Jesus has other priorities. Jesus came to serve, not to be served.

This passage reminds us that Jesus' way is so different to our way. We live in a culture that provides such a great focus on self and creating our lives as we would like them to be. We seek happiness in wanting to be prosperous, strong, successful and influential. We are constantly reminded to live our best life and that self-care is the secret to happiness and well-being. However, the statistics and our experiences would suggest that we have never been more unwell and unhappy. Don't get me wrong. I am not saying that well-being is unimportant, however perhaps Jesus can help us think about it in new ways and provide a new lens through which we can reflect.

Jesus is clear that following him means losing self and he has come to usher in a new world order, one that is upside down to our way of thinking. Our purpose is to let go of the focus on self and give of ourselves to others and through this experience life, life in all its fullness. Perhaps we find ourselves, our sense of purpose, our fullness of life when we look up to see the needs of those around us and attend to these needs.

For me this is one of the great contributions Lutheran education can make to the lives of children and young people; we reach our greatest potential, our most complete self, in relationship with and service of others. This is what service learning is all about, involving our children and students in developing deep understandings of the needs of people in their own communities, our country, the world and responding in all kinds of loving service. Following Jesus shifts the focus from the inner self and engages the head, heart and hands in outward action.

I wonder what might happen if all the time, energy and resources that we put into well-being were also directed into service learning which included a review of all curriculum areas to explore opportunities for meaningful learning about the needs of others and the people and organisations who are active in responding to these needs. It wouldn't just be a unit completed once a year or a fund-raising event but rather a way of learning that provides opportunities to take action and respond to the needs of others in real ways that deepens the learning. I wonder if this occurred whether we might report that all our students and teachers feel more like themselves, purpose driven, energised and content.

Growing deep states it clearly:

Lutheran schools and early childhood services, as part of the mission of the Lutheran church, are communities of worship and service, sharing and living the good news of Jesus Christ.

Lutheran schools and early childhood services are communities which acknowledge God as creator and join in the ongoing creation and care of the world and all people.

Lutheran schools and early childhood services are communities of hope, nurtured by the promises of God's word, love and forgiveness which empower staff and students to embrace the future with confidence.

I am sure that there are schools who would say this is their experience.

Jesus reminds us that we are so loved, he invites us to follow him, to be willing to risk our lives for the sake of others, to live our lives in love and service of others. Maybe in loving others we learn to love ourselves and we really could change the world.

Song: [Less like me](#) Zach Williams

[Prayer](#)

Additional insights that could be used for reflection:

And so, this is a passage, fundamentally, about our life, our identity. Where do we find our identity, as individuals and as Jesus' followers? If we find our identity in our preferences or our comfort zones, then we will lose our identity because that is the nature of an impermanent, shifting world. That's what Peter was discovering. But if we find our identity, our life, solely in Christ and in the gospel, we will save our identity because Christ and the gospel are eternal. [St Andrew's Enfield](#)

Most of us will not face giving our own precious life for the sake of another, but we do have opportunities daily to consider how we define failure or success, or to choose between self-preservation or life-giving for others. In the clash between human values and God's values, what does it look like to lose our life for the sake of the gospel in order to save it? [Marilyn Salmon](#)

In our "clean and neat" westernized Christian culture this almost sounds like an oxymoron. Someone switched the price tags. You see, at every turn our culture screams at us: "You must be yourself! You must actualize yourself! Be Numero Uno and bump off as many as you can on your way up the success ladder." Jesus says, *If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself.* Instead we must let Christ shine through us. The apostle Paul says, "It is no longer I that lives, but Christ who lives in me." Self-denial doesn't imply a poor self-image that says, "poor me - I'm a nobody." Rather self-denial in the Christian sense implies knowing exactly who we are in relationship to God. [Faithlife sermons](#)

The Christian church at the time of the Renaissance was riding high. It dominated the personal, social and political lives of Europeans. The landscape was dotted with its magnificent cathedrals. The church could command armies to do its will. Its leaders lived like princes, surrounded by wealth and pomp.

In its return to the Bible, the Reformation rejected this "theology of glory" in favour of a "theology of the cross." To follow Jesus is to live lives of service to others, to serve rather than to control and dominate. It means the opposite of being proud of station and status for ourselves at the expense of others.

The "theology of the cross" or "to deny oneself" does not mean a contrived kind of humility. We do not follow Jesus by demeaning ourselves. We are called upon to do the very best we can with the talents and abilities God has given us. To "deny oneself" means to keep one's priorities in harmony with what Jesus told us in the two "great commandments" — love God and love your neighbour (Mark 12:28-31). [Michael Rogness](#)

[Pre-teen and teen mental health](#)

Blessings for your week,

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