

Mark 8: 31-9:1

31 Then Jesus began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³²He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

34 He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.' ⁹1And he said to them, 'Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.'

Commentary: Now we encounter the full implications of what it means to confess Jesus as messiah and to follow him. The messiah will not yet come in glory to establish God's kingdom of justice and peace. Before this happens and before there is resurrection, there must be preparation and suffering. It will require not only an embracing but a letting go, not only an accepting but a giving up, not only a positive love of God and neighbour but self-denial, taking up the cross, and losing one's life before life is given back renewed.

But of course, the negative and positive flow of the gospel call is all part of one movement. The healing, forgiving, embracing love of God which Jesus proclaims in word and deed is the stimulant for giving up and letting go whatever blocks and deflects our response in love back to God and our neighbour. And even though this giving up and letting go (self-denial), can have its cost in terms of changing, giving up and taking up things in our lives, it is also the means by which we discover a whole new way to fulfillment and meaning for our living in this world.

But our initial reaction and response is probably that of Peter. Give us glory not suffering. We cannot understand how suffering hallowed can be the source of a glory far transcending anything this world can promise or offer.

What's unique for us in this time of Covid-19, is that the giving up and letting go is something imposed on us rather than something we choose to do for a greater good to come. It's not good that we have to keep distance from people, or that we cannot go out and gather in so many ways that are fulfilling. It's not good that people are getting sick and dying and that people are having to live and work at so much personal risk. But such a time can also push us into a more urgent self-examination in terms of the meaning of our lives. We all have things we need to let go and give up no matter who we are. And we all need to reflect on how following Jesus has a cost when it means

commitments to justice and the discipline of loving in concrete, often challenging relationships and situations. How are you being challenged to give up and let go and how are you being challenged to get more serious with commitments, personal disciplines and decisions to engage life more deeply?

We are now in the 2nd half of the gospel story and things will get more intense before the promise of resurrection comes.

Prayer: We find this a difficult story, O God. We love the healing miracles and the positive love Jesus inspires in us. But the challenge to give up and let go so that space is created in us for you to come in... that's harder. We're afraid of putting everything on the table in all areas and relationships of our lives. We're afraid of the word 'cost.' We have a hard time trusting that we will gain the true essence of our lives as we give up 'the world' whatever that means for us. We have a hard time trusting that true abundance and true peace can only come as we rid ourselves of baggage, habits and attachments... Accompany us in this fearful and uncertain time we are all living through... Accompany us until we are ready to go further along and a little deeper on the journey with you... Amen.