

Sermon for Sunday, August 30, 2026

Pentecost 14 – Matthew 16:21-28

Rev. Jerry Borkowski - Assistant to the Bishop, Saskatchewan Synod

Grace and Peace be unto you from God our Creator and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

So, what do you think it means to pick up the cross, or rather take up the cross. Maybe it's phrased carry the cross? If we were to ask that question to our church members, we would often get a very "churchy response" of some sort. People may respond that it means something about suffering or something about forgiveness of sins. It is something that we believe in. It's part of who we are as God's people.

People are often hesitant to answer the question because they are so sure it has to have a theological answer. It must be the right response because it is central to the faith. At least that how it seems, doesn't it?

The cross is a central symbol of our faith and to us as people of God. Most churches will have a cross on the outside of the building or right on the top of the roof. If there is a church sign, then it will be there. And when you go into the building you will see crosses everywhere, on the wall, behind the altar, on the hymnals, and anywhere else that you may look. Count the numbers of places and it will surprise you or maybe not, because, after all this is a church. Yes, the cross is an important symbol for the Christian community and so it should be.

Not only is the cross on the building it also is a item that we wear. Necklaces; clergy wear a cross as part of their liturgical garb; often it is a piece of jewelry that we wear to complement our clothing.

Here's our first question: what is the difference between carrying the cross and wearing the cross? I suggest that there is a difference. If it is a reminder of Christ's death and resurrection, then that has meaning for me. If I wear it as a witness to my faith and it identifies me and says something about me, then it serves a purpose. It is a part of my life. But just saying something, is that is enough? Should there not be more? I think so, I will allude to it a little later.

Many of us have been part of a conversation where someone has concluded their comments with the phrase, “Well, I guess that is my cross to bear.” What does that mean? What are they saying?

At times this kind of comment reflects how the person understands what it means to suffer, and the weight of their burden is a sign that they have an understanding of how Jesus must have felt. What is also noted is that their burden/cross is really about family annoyances that can easily trivialize the cross.

Clayton Schmidt in his commentary on this text says that most of us, when we hear that we should take up our cross, do it with some degree of gladness, because we know that’s what we are called to do. Often it has to do with things that are not all that crucial to us, like serving on that boring church committee, which we think is not that important, but someone has to do it, right? Or we help out the people who annoy us — because in our mind that is carrying our cross. To take up the cross is to deny oneself — it is not to safeguard our way of life by adding some action that will somehow fulfill what we think is our obligation of being a follower of Jesus..

The problem is, we are poor at cross bearing. To be fair, that might have been the same for the disciples. They had seen crosses — they knew what they were used for. They had witnessed the horrible pain and suffering that went with someone nailed to a cross.

Yes, for the disciples the thought of carrying a cross was a life and death matter — and many of the disciples died because they followed the Messiah.

For us to bear a cross is a figurative idea. No-one really expects to die in the process of carrying our cross and following Jesus. Even denying ourselves seems at times too much to ask. We are not much good at either one of these responses.

If we follow Jesus, we will be seriously called to bear certain crosses and lose our lifestyle if not our life. Yet in all our weakness, and human mindedness, it is Jesus’ own death that enables us to do what we cannot.

Living in this time of such upheaval and uncertainty, how then does it play out for us to carry our cross and follow Jesus?

To take up our cross and follow can be difficult for people who are living in a culture that pressures people to be subordinate to others in a way that is not self-affirming.

Douglas Hare in the INTERPRETATION series on the book of Matthew says, “Properly understood, the saying does not call for self-effacement but for affirmation of one’s self as a child of God.” The weight of this statement does not exhort martyrdom but a fearless following of a crucified Lord. It means to truly walk the way of the cross in one’s daily life. To think about how we live, what we say and what we do, that they are consistent.

David Lose says that “Faith is a full contact participation sport.” You can’t carry your cross from the sidelines — you need to get involved. You can’t know God by sitting on the sidelines — you need to take a risk. You have to get off the couch. It means involvement to carrying the cross. It means it’s a part of your daily life. I appreciate the way Karoline Lewis puts it, that to carry one’s cross is to carry the choices and burdens and realities of a life that has made a commitment. A commitment to a way of life that is committed to bring about the Kingdom of God here and now. When we make a commitment to live as people of God, carrying the cross, following, it is about a commitment that is important to us that makes a statement of our life.

I would like to suggest that to live a committed life like this, it is about continuing to grow in our faith and making a difference to grow where you are planted. That’s the call for us as people of God. May that journey that you are on be mindful that that is how we make a difference for people of this world who need to know and need to see that the Good News is lived out in each of our lives.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.