

## THE UNPOPULAR MESSAGE OF THE MAN FROM GALILEE

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Series: ReFocus  
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Discipleship, Vision, Self Denial  
Luke 9:18-23

So we have been spending our weeks talking about discipleship or apprenticing under rabbi Jesus as the only means to fulfil the vision and the mission of Trinity Vineyard and any church for that matter.

I have invited us to do everything it takes to orient our lives around 3 goals:

1. Being with Jesus
2. Becoming like Jesus
3. Doing what Jesus Did.

These are the three ways in which discipleship happens. And if we are going to be disciples of Jesus, these have to be our goal too.

Today I wanna introduce a very unpopular message from the man from Galilee who is our rabbi, Jesus. A message so unpopular that the church sometimes wants to find a way around it. And even more so in our day and age of self-gratification.

One day, Jesus was hanging out with his disciples like he always did. He was with them, praying because prayer has to be a practice for a disciple of Jesus like we talked about last weekend. And also community life.

And like all of us we all sometimes wonder what people think about us, do we not? So he asks his disciples what they have heard on the streets about him and it gives rise to a very cool conversation. Here it is:

*Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say I am?”*

*They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life.”*

*“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”*

*Peter answered, “God’s Messiah.”*

*Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone. And he said, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”*

*Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.*

**Luke 9:18-23**

So like every intriguing person, everyone had something to say about who Jesus was. But the Holy Spirit reveals this unique truth to Peter. That Jesus was God’s Messiah, the promised King. This is the cornerstone on which our faith is founded. That Jesus is God’s promise to Israel and all of creation. Finally, God’s true blessing to creation has come. And we often pay a lot of attention to this part of that engagement and rightfully so.

But our journey has been around the other part. If the Messiah has come and his mission is to bless the world, to bring 'God’s Kingdom come in Nakuru as it is in heaven,' and in your family as it is in heaven then we as his disciples are called to join him in this mission.

This is why we have been talking about discipleship as the cornerstone of our vision series. This church has been called to join God in his mission and you do that by discipleship under Jesus. And even if you are still not at the place where you think you have anything to do with the city, the life you are looking for can only be found in learning from Jesus, that is what discipleship is. And It is not a one-off class, but a daily journey.

So Jesus in this conversation with his friends and students tells them, what it must take to be his disciples:

*“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.*

Crosses over the centuries have become another piece of art. A beautiful necklace or earpiece, a piece of art for the church stage. But there was nothing attractive about the cross. This was a brutal instrument of murder perfected by the Romans.

It was so brutal and shameful that it was not permitted to crucify Roman citizens. No matter the crime. It was reserved for the colonised non-citizens. Because once you dehumanise people you give yourself permission to treat them however you want. Then the crucified would be hung at the city gates for all to see. This was done to fill the hearts of people with fear. This is what happens to anyone who dares to defy Rome.

So many times in the New Testament when they talked about Jesus’ crucifixion they would simply say, “And they crucified him.” They did not need to say more because that in itself would communicate the brutality of it all. But we in our century have grown too accustomed to hearing it and sometimes it lacks the impact it had.

I heard someone say it this way, talking about crucifixion would be the equivalent of if Jesus was killed by ISIS on TV. When this happens all we say is ISIS killed him or she was

beheaded by ISIS. That is enough to communicate to us the horror of that death. Most sensible news station would not even show the video because we all know the horror.

So when Jesus looks at his disciples and says they must crucify themselves none of them thought of making it into a song chorus the next morning, “the cross before me, the world behind me.” None of them thought of making a cross logo for his t-shirt or tattoo. What probably followed was awe and silence. Some may have even thought about turning away. Because it was horrifying and brutal.

But Jesus unlike me was not worried about how many people come to his meetings or how many people watch the online stream. He did not mince his words when he spoke those unpopular words, “Take up your cross and walk with me.”

Deitrich Bonhoeffer was a believer who actually died under Hitler's Nazi regime for his faith said, ***“When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die”***.

I don't know if he knew at that time that it would actually happen to him but it seems he had had a glimpse of what Jesus meant with his unpopular message, “Take up your cross and walk with me”.

And do we hear the message even today? For some, like Bonhoeffer, Paul, Peter, the martyrs of Uganda whose murder site George and I visited, just like Jesus it meant actual physical death. Would you still be willing to follow if that was the call? Would you still say, “The cross before me, the world behind me?”

Yet the call is the same really when Jesus called you, he bid you come and die. It is death to this culture, it is death to individualism it is death to you being the centre of your universe.

Jesus knows that the way to new life is actually through the doorway of death, burial and then the resurrection. If you are longing for life in Jesus, the life you see in him the life you see promised, there is no other path but through death. It is only after death that there is resurrection life. “Take up your cross and walk with me”

What things is God calling you to die to? I heard a story of the Knite Templers, a group of mercenaries who made war for a living. And at some point, they waged war in the name of the church a sad but true part of the history of the church. When they would get baptised, they would have their hand holding the sword out of the water.

It was almost like they were saying, ***“God I give you everything, but not this”***. Not the violence that they had become accustomed to, it was their way of making money and how they found status in society too.

And we would find that crazy and weird and maybe even laughable but we live in the same way. If some of us look back at our baptism we were probably holding out of the water a phone habit, a browser history, a relationship that gives us our identity or quells our fears, a way of making money or even our politics. Often we are telling God, I will give you everything but this and Jesus looks at us and, “Take up your cross and walk with me.” And it is not death for death's sake but Jesus is confident of the resurrection power that gets us to real life.

What you are holding on to, could be what is keeping you from the life Jesus has promised you.

And the thing is, it does not happen ones do it? Jesus wants to be very clear and say, “It is every day.” Some of us think it was done when we decided to follow Jesus and in a way it is, and it is also every day. Because every day we will be faced with things that rise up both inside us and around us that we will have to constantly crucify.

And when they heard this they probably did not quite get it. Maybe it made more sense to them after Jesus himself took the cross quite literally and then they were filled with hope when they saw him rise from the dead.

The resurrection gave them hope that this too would be their story. And then they were empowered by the Holy Spirit. It becomes their very way of life too. It should be ours too. The power of resurrection literally lives in us through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Take a look at the writing of a disciple much later, his name was Paul. He too had learned to follow Jesus and I bet this story and teaching from Jesus had been taught to him and now he was teaching it. This is what he writes

*But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you won't fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, that you may not do the things that you desire. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the deeds of the flesh are obvious, which are: adultery, sexual immorality, uncleanness, lustfulness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, strife, jealousies, outbursts of anger, rivalries, divisions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these; of which I forewarn you, even as I also forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit God's Kingdom.*

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things, there is no law. Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and lusts.*

*If we live by the Spirit, let's also walk by the Spirit. Let's not become conceited, provoking one another, and envying one another.*

**Gal 5:16-26**

Paying some attention to verse 24

*Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and lusts.*

This is the unpopular message of the man from Galilee especially in a culture we live in of self-gratification and even better if it is instant. The message of our culture is your body your choice, the message of Jesus is to crucify the flesh and follow me.

The message of the world is as long as it does not impact anyone else, do whatever you want. The message of Jesus is to "crucify the flesh and follow me". The world's message is that our political parties are king, Jesus says "take up your crucify the flesh and follow me". The world says all is fair in love and war, Jesus says "crucify the flesh and walk with me". Guess what, this will be a daily taking up of the cross.

Look at the list Paul has up there? I mean some of you get to the sorcery bit and say you are safe but then the list continues and you realise it is talking to all of us. Are we holding up some of this out of our baptism water? Is this what is keeping us from following Jesus?

Listen, there is a better life, life in the Kingdom, but it takes taking up the cross... That is the way to resurrection. And let us be clear about what this means. Paul and Jesus are saying that the things we see in our lives that God is calling us away from we must deal with them with the ruthlessness of crucifixion and the cross.

We cannot afford to be casual about sin and other things that are coming between us and following Jesus. That is why the message is often unpopular but Jesus does not seem to have that problem, he does not mince his words, "Take up your cross and walk with me".

And make no mistake, it involves our body. Jesus was crucified in the flesh. There is no following of Jesus that does not include what we do with our bodies, our time and our money. We have to abandon this idea that there is Gospel without the cross or a resurrection without a crucifixion.

Listen, the Gospel is offensive to many. It is not one that some people stopped following Jesus after they heard what it takes to follow him. I mean there is always a crowd, it's gotta be there. They followed Jesus for food and miracles. Jesus made them feel good. Sadly so many believers get stuck at the 'crowd' stage. They want God to make them feel good and ask nothing of them.

Then there are a few people who move past the crowd and believe. This is the Messiah, he teaches with authority, what is true and right. Where then many get stuck is when Jesus teaches what it means to follow him. The taking up of the cross. To receive the life of the resurrection.

At one point a huge number of his disciples stopped following Jesus saying that he had hard teachings. Jesus turned to the 12 and asked if they too wanted to go. They replied, "**To whom would we go? You have the words of life.**"

I always feel like that response says, “I mean we would go somewhere else if we had an option. But you are the real deal.”

We need to be careful not to move from there to preach a gospel that costs us nothing. If you are following Jesus and you do not get to places in your life where you actually feel like you would rather turn away and not keep following, then check that you have not left out parts of the Gospel of the Kingdom.

Let me tell you some stories as I finish. They come from Luke 9:57-62. I imagine Jesus was teaching a crowd and these guys get stirred up. They believe that this is the real deal and he is the messiah. Or at the very least the best rabbi to apprentice under. Just like so many of us sitting here today.

Then one person shouts from the crowd as they are walking by the streets, “Jesus, I want to follow you everywhere you go!” Or maybe that Sunday morning he had just gone to church and sang the song, “Where you go I go, where you stay I stay”

Guess what Jesus response was?

*Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”*

That is not encouraging anyone to follow, is it? But Jesus does not mince his words. There is a cost to following. He is essentially asking him, “Really, are you sure you want to follow me? What if it meant being homeless like me?”

Then as they keep walking, Jesus looks at one of them and invites him to follow. “Hey, you follow me!”

The conversation goes like this:

*But he replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”*

*Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”*

He just received the greatest invitation ever. And it is about like he is a bad person. His answer could mean actually just going back home and doing his duty to his family and honour his father. He just has a few things he wants to first do in life before he commits to following Jesus.

How many times do we have excuses for not doing what God has called us to do? “I am too young. I will give my life fully when I am older.” “Everyone my age does this, One day I will stop and follow Jesus” “But this our culture, this is America or this is the 254, this is how we roll” or “I would be missing out if I do not do this or go there”

How many times do we have excuses for not taking up our cross and actually following Jesus? How often is it better to sing it in a song and cry our eyes out as the Holy Spirit ministers to us than actually doing anything about it?

Then someone watching all those interactions believes that they are more ready to follow Jesus. And they say to Jesus:

*Still, another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family."*

He has been to church that Sunday morning and sang, "I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back"

Then thought, okay let me just go do this one more time. Let me just say bye to my family.

And Jesus' response?

*Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."*

There cannot be looking back.

There was yet another guy who came to Jesus so full of faith and said they wanted to follow him. Jesus said, "well and good. Go sell everything and come follow me." The guy was so wealthy and could not imagine losing it all. So he walked away and Jesus does not call him back to maybe make the message lighter. Tell him he could sell half of it and then try again later. No Jesus lets him go and looks on him with love.

There nothing wrong with being wealthy, it's just for this man, his wealth was what was in the way of following Jesus. It needed to be crucified.

Behold the unpopular message of the man. From Galilee, "Take up your cross and walk with me. The cross is a brutal and ruthless putting away of anything that comes in the way of following Jesus? What is the Holy Spirit showing you are in the way of following Jesus? Money, sex, power, and identity, a relationship, an app?

The Good news is you are crucified with Jesus. You have been made whole. The same power that conquered the grave lives in you. Through the Holy Spirit, you have the same power that allowed Jesus to face the cross and even brought Him back to life.

Let's Pray