

“Dining Take-Out”

In 14 separate passages in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus talks specifically about following Him. Our own language mirrors that emphasis because at KPC our goal is to both build and become “fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.”

Perhaps the most famous of all the “following Christ” passages is Mark 8:34-38. Here’s a “take home” sermon—a Bible study meant to take you Deeper into this all-important subject of following Christ.

Then, calling the crowd to join His disciples, He said, “If any of you wants to be My follower. . . (Mark 8:34 NLT)

Notice that Jesus turns His attention to the crowd and invites them to join His disciples. (Interesting how Jesus consistently “preaches” to those distant from Him as well as to His followers, isn’t it?) At the heart of being a disciple of Jesus is believing in Him as the Son of God (1 John 1:1-4). The first step in following Christ is putting your faith in Him.

Lord Jesus, today I put my faith in You. You are drawing me towards you and I sense it clearly. From the center of my being, I know that I need a Savior . . . and that You are that Savior. Receive me. Accept me. Forgive me. Empower me to follow You as my Lord. I give myself to You. Save me.

“If any of you wants to be My follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow Me.” (Mark 8:34)

Once we have put our faith in Christ, central to following Him is “turning from our selfish ways.” Everything in this life teaches us to put ourselves first. It’s our most primary instinct . . . yet it’s that part of us that most needs to “die” (Galatians 2:20). What does that look like? This week many of us got the following email from Jim Matthews, a member of KPC whose wife, Maryann, was just diagnosed with stage 4 cancer . . .

“We will continue to take one day at a time and trust that God will continue to sustain us. I am thankful for so many of you who have been the agents through whom God is acting to daily give us the strength and encouragement we need. I know that our crisis is not the only struggle out there, and many of you have difficult situations of your own, and I would like to take this chance to pray for all of you. I know that there are a number of you who may not have a faith in Christ, but I hope you will accept my prayer in the spirit of gratitude with which it is offered.

May God pour out His blessings in each of your lives. May He sustain you in difficulty; may He provide for you out of His abundance; may He fill you with His peace and give you joy through all of your trials and sufferings. May He grant you wisdom in your decisions and favor in the eyes of those who have the power to affect your circumstances. May He heal any of you who are sick and encourage those who are heavy hearted. May He provide clarity where there is confusion and confidence where there is doubt.

May you rise up on wings like eagles and soar above any turbulence, and may you each know the assurance that God loves you, knows your circumstances and is in control; and that He longs to comfort you and have you cast all of your cares upon Him – for He is a God of compassion who is able to do far more than we can even think or ask. He is always in control, and He is always acting out of His incomparable love to draw us to Himself and give us abundant life. Be blessed!”

Notice how Jim has made a decision to keep his focus on the needs of others in the midst of an incredible trial. This is a profound “unselfishness” and expresses the very heart of Christ. First of all, I am confident that Jim will see ever-increasing blessing in his life and the life of his family as he seeks to “give away” the grace of God to others. Let’s join him in prayer for his family and his wife Maryann as she battles cancer.

Lord Jesus, I ask you to show me in what relationships and settings I need to work on being less self-focused and more Christ-focused. I acknowledge I spend way too much time thinking about me. And Lord, I do pray that you will sustain the Matthews family and all who have real needs. I pray that You will heal Maryann Matthews and that You will heal and sustain all who battle disease of any kind.

“But if you give up your life for My sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it.” (Mark 8:35 NLT)

Two things strike me. First of all, giving up our lives for “Jesus’ sake.” I think of knowing Him personally . . . building a deep, intimate relationship with Christ. That means daily prayer, reading Scripture—the personal spiritual disciplines. (Matthew 26:40)

Secondly, “for the sake of the Gospel.” Jesus means a total reordering of our lives around the message that God forgives and renews through Christ. So . . . how are you doing with that? Is the “reason you’re alive” to get the message of Jesus Christ to those who do not know Him? What would it look like to re-arrange your life around this absolute priority that we share Christ? (Romans 1:13-17)

Lord Jesus, I’m still working on the basics. Help me to focus myself on You through daily prayer and Scripture reading. I want to so fall in love with You that I live quite naturally for “Your sake.” In the same way, I still struggle to share my faith with others. Give me the grace to want to live “for the sake of the Good News.”

“If anyone is ashamed of Me and My message in these adulterous and sinful days, the Son of Man will be ashamed of that person when He returns in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.” (Mark 8:38)

Here’s where the rub is, right? So many of us are ashamed of Christ. Or are we really? Is it that we’re ashamed of Christ . . . or are we ashamed of our inability to share the amazing message and truth of Christ? For many of us, it might really be more about the latter than the former. If that’s you, then I don’t think the stern warning applies, because you’re not ashamed of Christ—you just feel unable to share the Gospel effectively.

Here’s what I’ve learned after 31 years of following Christ and sharing His message . . . you’re pretty bad at it to begin with. At least I was. But, like anything, the way you get good at sharing the message that Jesus Christ saves is by doing it. And remember, you have the Holy Spirit helping you. (John 14:26; John 15:26)

Lord Jesus, teach me how to share my faith effectively. Give me the ability to be humble, honest, winsome, thoughtful, truthful, and bold. Even more so, show me today whom You have put in my life to reach for Christ. I pledge myself towards that person to seek to win them.