



54A - PENTECOST 12A BIBLE STUDY ONLINE

Take up your cross

Abstract

For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.
Matthew 16:27

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Take up your cross

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Old Testament & Psalm, Option I

Old Testament Exodus 3:1–15

Psalm Psalm 105:1–6, 23–26, 45c

or

Old Testament & Psalm, Option II

Old Testament Jeremiah 15:15–21

Psalm Psalm 26:1–8

New Testament Romans 12:9–21

Gospel Matthew 16:21–28ⁱ

Having acknowledged the truth of Peter’s declaration, Jesus tells his friends what kind of king he will be: one that suffers. And he tells them that they too will suffer if they come after him; it is the only way to find the life they seek.

This week’s resources explore: being invited to share in Jesus’ story, which is as tough as it is good.

Welcome and opening prayer

A gathering prayer

Lord, the disciples gathered around you,
trying so hard to answer your questions,
and to cope with difficult news.

We come before you now and ask your blessing,
as we seek to understand more of your story –
your tough and challenging,
but so good story!

Amen.

Readings

Matthew 16:21–28

²¹ From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

²² Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!”

²³ Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. ²⁶ What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? ²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to

come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.

²⁸ "Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." ⁱⁱ

respond

For the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Read the text

Consider different ways to read the text. For example, sharing parts between several readers, or hearing it more than once using different versions, or using/adapting this suggestion.

Present the Gospel

This script uses the ancient dramatic device of a chorus to narrate and comment on the text. Two single speakers (Voice 1 and Voice 2) step out from the group to speak the Gospel text itself.

Alternatively, five individual voices could be used – one for each section of the text.

Voice 1: From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

Chorus: Puzzle, puzzle; lots of trouble.

Voice 2: And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, 'God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.'

Chorus: Puzzle, puzzle; don't make trouble.

Voice 1: But Jesus turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

Chorus: Listen, Peter, don't be dim. Worship God, serve only him.

Voice 2: Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?'

Chorus: Listen all, take up your cross. Selfish life is just a loss.

Voice 1: 'For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.'

Chorus: Mortal lifted up to glory. Join him and complete the story.

Exegesis

Gospel

Matthew 16.21-28

Peter thought that his confession meant that Jesus was the conquering Messiah who would lead his army to drive the Romans into the sea and take back the land. Not so, says Jesus. It means suffering and rejection. Peter is having none of it. Suddenly we are back in the desert of temptation with Jesus rebuking the devil who would seek to divert him from his mission. Whereas his confession was a divine revelation, Peter's rebuke of Jesus was all too human, even demonic.

The first mention of crosses is not the one Jesus will lift – he talks only of his suffering – it is the one that any who would follow him must take up. There is real risk of suffering if we follow Jesus. But

there is also the hope of finding the only truly rewarding life (vv.25-26). It is not by clinging to the things that matter to us, the insights we have gained – even though they may have come from God – or the place we have carved out for ourselves in the world. All those things result in us forfeiting our lives. It is in losing everything that we find what we long for.

Finally, Jesus refers to himself as 'Son of Man'. He does this when he is making a significant statement about his identity. It is almost certainly derived from Daniel chapter 7 where the prophet sees one like a son of man ascending on the clouds and coming to God to be given all authority, an authority that he proceeds to share with all those who are with him.

The clue to what Jesus is saying here is in the final enigmatic verse. Some suggest that this refers to the transfiguration, where some of the disciples see Jesus in his glory (in Matthew's account this happens just six days after the events in today's passage). But it is more likely that this refers to those who witness his death and resurrection. As he comes to the cross and from the grave he is coming into his kingdom. Jesus' kingship is born of suffering and its glory is seen in that suffering on behalf of a world that needs a story more powerful than another one of a conqueror on a white charger. It needs the story of one who liberates and overcomes through suffering, through the cross.

The links between the lectionary readings

All three readings focus on the cost of following the counter story to the one trumpeted by the empire. Jeremiah's call would lead to a great deal of suffering. Jesus was the king but his destiny was a bloody journey through rejection, death and suffering to resurrection. Paul sees the benefits of that sacrifice springing up in cities across the empire, where people captured by the message give up their lives to attain something so much better.

Picture Pointer

- How does this image speak to you of the Christian way of life?
- How do you respond when life is tough?
- What does losing your life for Jesus' sake mean to you?



End the session

Live your faith

Keep a personal tally of things you do this week that might be considered 'self-giving' or 'self-preserving.' (See Work out the balance.) How balanced is your personal scale?

A sending out prayer

Lord God, you knew what was going to happen to you.

You didn't flinch, or back away.

You calmly told the disciples – and us – what to expect.

As we go out now, remind us constantly to look to you in the good and the tough times.

Guide us as we go in your name. **Amen.**