

Take up your cross

Notes on the Bible readings

- The passage from Matthew is the second half of the narrative in Caesarea Philippi. Jesus is unpacking what the titles Messiah and Son of God will mean: he will undergo great suffering and rejection. He will die and then be raised on the third day. Peter's response is understandable, but it echoes the temptation narrative, when the devil offers Jesus great power if he abandons God's way. Peter has gone from getting something spectacularly right to getting something spectacularly wrong!
- If Jesus himself will have to suffer, his followers must be prepared for suffering, too. Jesus highlights the downside of owning his story: there is sacrifice involved. Anyone who wants to step into this story must be prepared to deny themselves and carry their cross – meaning, prepared to give up their life. But, again, there is a promise of liberation: anyone prepared to give up their life for the kingdom of God will find the life they were always looking for.
- Jesus' story follows a narrative arc of life, suffering and descent into death, and then ascent into glory. This is the story that he invites his disciples and us to share.

Keep telling the story

The story of the cross, the story of redemption, in which suffering undermines oppression, is the heart of the Christian story, and has profoundly influenced the nature of story and storytelling within our culture. What stories, novels, films, etc. do you know that have the idea of redemption at their heart?

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Questions for reflection

- ▶ 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?



A prayer for others

Lord God, you reproached Peter because he had only human concerns; but Peter just wanted to protect the one he loved.

We pray for people the world over who find themselves in difficult situations.

We pray that they would all have someone to care for them and lift them before you.

We pray for all who are persecuted for their faith: for all who are misunderstood, for asylum seekers who flee real danger in their homeland.

We pray for those who work tirelessly to address wrongs.

We pray for people whose lives don't always work out right, through their fault, or through no fault of their own.

We pray for the people in our lives who need your protection, Lord, that we will always be faithful in prayer for them. Amen.

A personal prayer

Lord, when we are faced with bad news, or a tricky situation, it is human nature to make snap judgements, to do the first thing that comes into our head.

Lord, help us to lay aside our own judgements, and always be willing to seek your wisdom. Amen.

Live your faith

Keep a (private) list of all the things you notice that you are thankful for. By doing so, build up a story that is trustworthy. Don't tell anyone – keep this as a reminder and an inspiration for you when other 'worldly' stories crowd in.