

2021-03-03 ... Midweek Reflection ... Revd Sam Johnson

'Take up Your Cross'

This phrase is repeated in all the gospels pretty much the same way. But what does this mean?

Preparing for the week's Lent Course on Tuesdays I read around a bit, and as Revd Judy reminded us – taking up your cross is about more than just a burden or a self-pitying pride that says: *"it's just my cross I have to bear"* ... it instead means 'dying'.

For everyone that heard, they would have known the Roman system of execution – carrying their own cross from the jail cell to the top of the hill – then being nailed to it and killed.

Take up your cross is being willing to die – to die, to follow Jesus.

I think it's far too easy in today's society where we have so many freedoms ... where saying we go to church or follow Jesus is free and easy. But do we become complacent?

In some countries owning a couple of bits of Scripture, or following Jesus can lead to death ... In those moments having the strength to say: *'I follow Jesus'* even when faced with death is the kind of commitment Jesus is calling for.

So what I want you to reflect on this week is to think about: **Am I willing to give up everything for the sake of my faith? Am I willing to give up everything in my following of Jesus and my relationship with God?** Because that is what is being asked of us ...

This isn't an easy thing to be asked, we want to hold on to all the good things, family, friends, job and relationships.

And if we had to choose – well we'd rather not have to, but if we did – what decisions would you make?

And if this seems like a tough question, ask God's Holy Spirit to come and fill you again with that same strength and knowledge and love of God.

Whilst it is a big ask to be willing to die to follow Jesus, there is abundance of life that comes from following Him.

Life then becomes a gift, it becomes something we are given and we are thankful for, it becomes something that has joy in unexpected places.

For me I've given up lots of things that are safe and secure to join ministry, to choose to serve in this particular way. But perhaps that's not your calling ... your calling may be smaller – but you may have experienced having to say no to something in order to say yes to God. Are you willing to make that choice – willing to say no to the thing that seems good because you want to follow God?

That's the challenge of this passage ... The cross isn't just a burden, isn't just a piece of jewellery or even just a symbol for our faith ... the cross is life itself, it's forgiveness, a new start, a daily chance to choose again to follow Jesus, to ask for God's forgiveness, grace, mercy and love which He freely gives to each one of us daily.

'Take up your cross and follow Me' is a big ask, but the reward is life itself.

'Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added unto you'

Amen.