

Friday, June 19, 2020

Taking up the cross daily

- Pastor Hank French

Then he said to them all, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me (Luke 9:23).

There are several important things to say about this short saying of Jesus. First, he apparently is talking to a crowd gathered to hear what he had to say. "He said to them all..." He wasn't just talking to his disciples who had already chosen to follow him. He was talking to people who may—or may not—have been considering if they wanted to become one of his followers.

There is no coercion, no shaming; no one is forced to become a follower of Jesus. There is only an invitation, to be accepted or not accepted. If the invitation to follow Jesus is accepted, however, there is a serious requirement—deny yourself, take up your cross daily, and follow him; go where he goes, do what he does.

Deny yourself simply means not to let yourself and your needs and desires be the center of every decision you make. When the situation demands it, to deny oneself is to freely let the wellbeing of others be the focus of the decision as to what to do.

To take up your cross does not mean to volunteer for martyrdom. The admonition to take up your cross "daily" refutes that idea. Over the years, I have heard folks talk—sometimes bitterly or resignedly—about the crosses they have to bear. An alcoholic spouse, or a chronically ill spouse or parent or child that needs to be cared for, or a troubled, rebellious child. Such things may or may not be "crosses" to bear.

They are not crosses to bear if they are taken up begrudgingly, if the sacrifices they bring cause resentment. They are crosses to bear if they are taken up willingly, if the sacrifices they bring are accepted as the price of love. To bear one's cross is an expression that points to a person's willingness to pay the price of love for the sake of the other.

Jesus paid the price of love, the price of loving us, and the price was high—literal crucifixion. Chances are that we will not have to pay as high a price for loving those around us. What matters is the willingness to accept the sacrifices that love may require.

Prayer: Jesus, you bore the cross for love of us; may we bear the cross for love of you and love of those around us who need us. Amen.