

Conversations on
Mark 8:31–38

Discuss this passage in light of the commentary below.

Idea! As a group, walk around the neighborhood in which you are meeting, looking for ways in which participants can take up their crosses and follow Jesus by serving those in need.

WHAT is important to know?

A climactic moment in Mark's Gospel occurs when Peter acknowledges Jesus' true status: "You are the Messiah" (Mark 8:29). This reading presents the ensuing conversation, which clarifies what Jesus' messiahship entails. The pattern of this passage—Jesus' prediction of his suffering, misunderstanding and resistance by his disciples, teachings on the nature of discipleship—appears twice more in the Gospel (9:30–37; 10:32–45). But by the end of this section the disciples seem no closer to comprehension and acceptance than they were at the beginning. (*Jouette M. Bassler*)

- ✧ After Peter's declaration of faith in Mark 8:29, Jesus "began" to teach about his suffering. Why at that moment?
- ✧ Why "must" Jesus, the Son of Man, suffer (v. 31)? What is the significance of that verb and tense?
- ✧ The Greek verb for "rebuke" (v. 32) is the same verb used when Jesus rebuked demons, spirits, and the sea. Why do you imagine Peter used such strong language?

WHERE is God in these words?

It is easy for us to skip over Peter's shock and revulsion at the prospect of a suffering messiah; we know the end of the story. This hinge in Mark's Gospel points us to Martin Luther's contrast between what he called the "theology of glory" and the "theology of the cross." The theology of glory is built on assumptions about the way a god is expected to act in the world. The theology of the cross, however, is grounded in God's self-revelation in the weakness of suffering and death. The theology of glory confirms what people want in a god; the theology of the cross contradicts everything that people imagine that God should be. (*Joseph D. Small*)

- ✧ Do you tend to act more from a "theology of glory" or a "theology of the cross"? How so?
- ✧ Do you find God more approachable in "glory" or in "weakness"? Why?

- ✧ This passage comes immediately after Peter's declaration of faith (8:29), and before Jesus' transfiguration (9:2–13). How does suffering play a role in knowing and following God?
- ✧ Where is the good news in this passage?

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

Mark has put this teaching moment of Jesus with his *disciples* at the center of his Gospel. Doing so, he reminds us that the first call Jesus made to others was not to be apostles or to be ordained or even to be members in the church, but simply to be his disciples, taking responsibility for going on their own journeys of faith with the living God. During Lent we are wise to ponder the picture of Jesus on the road to Jerusalem, calling all his disciples to take up our own crosses and to walk with him in paths of love and service. (*Paul C. Shupe*)

- ✧ In what ways do you deny yourself when following Christ?
- ✧ What crosses do you carry in your journey of faith?

NOW WHAT is God's word calling us to do?

This is a word for *everyone* who would be Jesus' disciple then and now. We must "deny" self; so long as the tyranny of self exists, we will never "take up" the cross. We will forever be seeking painless shortcuts to the kingdom. All our efforts to make another way are a denial of the one who showed us the way, the way of the cross. When we are finally willing to accept Jesus for who he is, the suffering one who lays down his life for others, then we can understand who we are to be, and we can take up the cross and follow him. (*W. Hulitt Gloer*)

- ✧ In what ways is our culture egocentric?
- ✧ How does the "tyranny of self" prevent us from taking up the cross?
- ✧ What does it mean to "accept Jesus for who he is"?
- ✧ In what ways is your Christian identity connected to Christ's suffering?

Thank God for the opportunity to take up Christ's cross in the world.