

In the name of Our Creator, Jesus Christ Our Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit Our Comforter, we share in the Word of God revealed to us this day. Amen

**By our very nature, we all want to healthy, strong, safe from disease, successful in life, and comfortable. That is who we are as human beings. And we want the same for our loved ones. In fact, we are all looking for three things in this life:**

- 1) A sense of community, a sense of belonging – very few of us do well living in total isolation. We crave contact with others of our own species and with all Creation.**
- 2) We are all looking for something to hold on to in life, something of substance, something to believe in. As Christians, we have our faith in our God and Creator.**
- 3) We are all looking for guidance in our lives. From a very small child looking to its parents or caregivers to teach that child how to survive in this world; to the elder who brings so much understanding about our world. Knowledge of how we, as humans, have been made stewards of God's gift of Creation. And there are even a those few world leaders who understand the need for justice and fairness in life. Truth is, we all are looking for these things in our lives. We all need to be guided through life.**

**Yet, Jesus had other priorities than being concerned about his own well-being when he embarked on his journey into ministry. He was less concerned about his own well-being and being cared for by others, or being served by others around him. After his wilderness experience, Jesus understood why the Creator had commissioned him to spread the “Good News” about the kingdom of God and that he was here to serve the needs of all humanity.**

**Judging by the way our world continues to operate in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century, many have failed to hear his message, or have chosen not to accept the ministry to which Jesus is calling us. Yet day-by-day, day-by-day, Jesus invites us to follow Him, and to live our lives by following his teachings and his example.**

**To understand more about the gospel reading for today, which Deb shared with us this morning, we need to look at a bit of background. Simon Peter, the one disciple Jesus thought understood what his ministry was about, has just called Jesus the ‘Christ’. Peter seems to have clearly understood what Jesus was doing. Now, as Jesus goes on to explain to his followers that he must suffer and die for his teachings and ministry, Peter reacts. Peter takes Jesus aside, off by himself, to set Jesus straight on**

**what He should be doing. About doing things that will promote the cause and not crush it.**

**Jesus, knowing the importance of the moment, gathers all the disciples and the crowds to himself. He then rebukes Peter in front of the disciples and the people gathered. And this rebuke is recorded in Scripture for us all to hear. Jesus then shares some of the most difficult verses attributed to his ministry, according to Mark, chapter 8:34-38.**

**“Take up your cross” and “deny yourself” would have had meaning for the disciples and the people gathered. They lived in a time when death on a cross was reserved for the most part, for slaves and criminals. And to “deny yourself” probably meant something to them that would have been totally beyond that which we would understand today. Today, “to take up your cross” should not be understood in the sense of having some contrived understanding of what ‘humility’ means. Suffering is not redemptive in and of itself. There is no justification for anyone to endure suffering just to be acceptable before God. We do not follow Jesus, by demeaning ourselves. We do not follow Jesus, by degrading ourselves.**

**We are called by God to do our level best with the abilities and talents we have been given. We need to**

**accept what God's kingdom is all about in this day and age. God's way is counter-cultural to how society believes humanity, as a species, functions today.**

**We must call out the evil and corruption in our society – the greed, the social inequalities, racial intolerance, economic insecurities, and our inability to accept gender and sexual orientations that may differ from our own. We need to speak out boldly about the evil that exists in our midst and how it will not disappear until all humanity comes to know God and to accept that the kingdom of heaven is with us, as we walk on this earth. We have been told through the words of Holy Scripture that all the earth will come to know God as Creator and King through the person of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Redeemer. Through the teachings of Jesus, we have come to know that the kingdom is here with us, right now and not in some distant future realm.**

**“To deny oneself” means changing our ways so that our priorities become one with Jesus' teachings. Jesus has given us a commandment by which we need to pattern our lives in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. It should not surprise you that we have heard this before. Remember the ‘great commandment’ – to love God above all else, and to love others, to love our neighbours as we would ask to be loved by them. In this passage from Mark's gospel, we**

**have the promise of new hope, new hope in the person of Jesus, the Christ. We have become disciples, followers of God's well-beloved Son, in whom we are to trust, to listen, and to model our own lives after. And God has promised that we will not be left alone in this journey of discipleship through this broken world. The Spirit of God, the Dove, has come into our midst and shares in our daily lives. God's goodness is present in this world and is at work overcoming the evil, the evil that is deeply rooted in so many nations and peoples. All the earth shall come to know Jesus as Redeemer and King, that is God's commission for us.**

**Jesus gives us hope for a better world and the promise of "life more abundant" (John 10:10). As one preacher has said, "we follow Jesus not just to be saved or to go to heaven; we follow Jesus, because it is worth it." You and I have been commissioned by God to do this work.**

**And, you know what? It is all worth it if we just believe we have the grace and love of God in our lives and share that love with all humankind. Amen**