water from rock

Selah: Stop, Look, Listen – December 31, 2022

The Lord be with you.

Do you ever get the feeling that Jesus might need to get a new press agent? And that he might need a new PR person to help him spin his message in this time of Self-fulfillment, self-actualization, self-esteem? What are we to make of Jesus talking so much about denying self and taking up crosses to follow him? How do you spin that? How good does that pull in a me generation? It is a curious, should I say, a provocative message about how to find real life, but it's a message that can change our lives.

Let's take a look at Jesus's words in the Gospel of Mark Chapter 8, Verses 34 through 36, where I read.

Jesus called the crowd with His disciples and said to them, If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life.

Mark's gospel says that Jesus is speaking to a crowd along with his disciples, and this crowd of lots of people, is so interested in what Jesus is saying that they have followed him out of Galilee from Bethesda up into the far north and Cesare Philippi. There was something about Jesus that is drawing them to Him. Now, make a note, make a note that this is happening at least a year before Jesus' arrest, trial and crucifixion. It's a year before the cross, and yet Jesus is calling people to take up their cross and follow Him.

Now, of course, Jesus knows that his life is going to lead him to a cross, but the people don't know that. So what's all this talk about taking up your cross? How would the crowd have understood Jesus words? Take up your cross. Well, the thought of carrying a cross would have riveted the attention of everyone in that crowd... I mean, they'd all seen crosses, too many of them in Roman occupied Gaililee. A crucifixion was an all too frequent horror show sponsored by the Romans. It was always done in a public space, they wanted everyone to see it as a condemned prisoner is beaten, scourged, strip naked, and then made to take up his cross and carry it through the town to the place of execution. And by carrying His cross through the town publicly, he was declaring to all his submission to an authority other than self. By carrying His

cross, he was declaring to all who saw him that his life had ended, that his life was no longer his own, that his life belonged to someone else, Rome.

So to hear what Jesus is saying, he is inviting people to give up their lives, to give up their false self with its allusions obsessions, to give up all of that and follow him in order to discover their true selves in Jesus and to be free to live for something greater. Something more wonderful than self. It's what the Apostle Paul discovers in Galatians chapter 2, verses 19 and 20, I have been crucified with Christ. Did you get that? I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And in that Paul is saying that he has discovered the joy, the freedom of giving up his false self and finding his new self in Jesus Christ.

When I was in college years ago, I had a friend who dropped out of school and he said, I need to find myself... Well, we find ourselves our true selves when we say no to our old false selves with a blind ambitions with the fruitless goals, we say no to all of that in order to say Yes to Jesus, to follow him and to find real life in him. We don't try to remake our lives to be better, I mean that's gonna be trying to save our lives, Jesus has to lose our lives so that we might find life in him.

I like how the message translates the last words of Jesus invitation to life, what good would it do to get everything you want and lose the real you... Jesus words are not that popular in a culture that talks so much about self-fulfillment, self-actualization, self-esteem and selfies, but in reality, Jesus is talking about the only way to real self-fulfillment, self-actualization, self-esteem. The Apostle Peter did not lose identity when He took up His cross to follow Jesus, Dietrich Bonehoffer did not lose his identity when he heard Jesus command, Follow me. Well, we know that the opposite is true, that they found their identity, they found their true selves and saying Yes to Jesus. And you know that's true for you and me too.

I have a friend who says, If God is your co-pilot switch seats. I like that, I like that because it's a reminder to let go of our lives, to find our new lives in Jesus Christ, that is a life of freedom, a life of joy, a life of love.

I am Tim Smith, a fellow traveler in the pilgrim way. Thanks for listening until next time.