

# **Just Keep on Walking**

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist Church February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2024 – Mark 8:31-38)

Now I don't know much about cricket, but I used to watch some of it with my brother, who loved it. There is a gentleman's rule that if you know you are out and even if the umpire doesn't call it, you walk. That is, you walk off the pitch as if you have been given out. Adam Gilchrist was one who did this, but there were many other Australians who didn't. When the cricket was on, there used to be a Johnnie Walker Whisky ad and the line was 'just keep walking'. I used to joke, that was, unless you were Ricky Ponting or Steve Waugh or some other players. Got me into a bit of trouble with my brother!

Jesus invites us to keep on walking. To keep on following, to put ourselves toward the end the queue rather than first and to take up our cross.

So, what is following?

- It is not just admiring someone, that enables one to stay a bit distant or detached. It may be that people serve the one they follow with caution and run off when the going gets tough, when it all gets a bit dangerous. Sound familiar with Peter after the Garden of Gethsemane event.
- It is not just worshipping God or Jesus, it is collaborating with them in bringing the good news to all the world.
- It is not just adhering to a set of teachings rather it means living out those teachings.
- It is active, we have to do something, we have to take to the road and follow wherever Jesus leads us.
- It means following through, we are in for the long haul and can't pull back when the going gets tough.
- We will get broken-hearted, we will get exhausted, we will be rejected but we will also share in the joy of others as they find peace, loved and acceptance.

Peter however struggles to understand what Jesus is saying and the implications. His idea of the Messiah is one who comes to conquer and rule, he doesn't understand why there will be suffering and death.

For Jesus taking up the cross means suffering and rejection, it means walking headlong into controversy. No doubt, the same will happen for us if we take up our crosses.

Many in our world are forced to take up their cross. Think of the terrible burden that the people of Gaza or Myanmar or Ukraine or Iran must carry each and every day. Think about the burden families who need to care for desperately ill family, or an older loved one with dementia. Think of the burdens those who have been abused carry. Or maybe the burden people who are addicted to substances and try to get off them and just can't carry such a burden every day.

Denying our self I think means have the willingness to embrace the pain of others. To put them before yourself and provide comfort to all who experience brokenness. Denying yourself if not about a licence to abuse yourself, it is just about putting God and others first.

Taking up our cross means sharing the highs and lows of those around us. Being there in their times of pain and suffering, celebrating with them their joys and helping them carry whatever their burden is. It means being involved with the lives of others, not just standing at a distance.

Losing your life in order to save it is somewhat of a paradox. However, if losing your life means putting the lives of others before your own it begins to make more sense. How do you feel when you do a good deed for someone? I suspect that the giving of something, be it material or financial, giving time, giving care makes you feel just as good in your soul as the recipient of such care, time or material assistance. True life is found when others are put first, when everyone is clothed with love and dignity. Now I don't deny there is a little bit of Peter in all of us. We too would prefer a leader who conquers all the injustice in the world with just a word, who can make all darkness disappear in an instant.

But that is not the kind of God we follow. That is not who Jesus is. Jesus is prepared to love the unlovely, include the outsiders, walk with those who struggle with their mental health, stand up against the powerful who exploit the poor.

Following Jesus is not a cake walk. It is not something to be taken lightly. It means getting our hands dirty in this messy and crazy world we find ourselves in. It means standing up against the rich, the powerful. It means taking the side of the 'little person'. It will lead to rejection by the world and ridicule from those around us. It might mean breaking the rules to put people first. It will mean binding the wounds of others. It is engaging in a lifestyle, a life lived for others, so that they might live.

Following is serious business, and we have to keep going no matter how tough the terrain becomes and we can keep going because Jesus is with us every step of the way.

So, as we continue our Lenten journey, just keep on walking, keep on following. Go out into the world in the knowledge that Jesus is our example, he is the figure going on ahead of us, who turns around and beckons us to continue with him on the journey. We don't walk alone, we carry each other, or at least are involved in the sharing of each other's crosses.

Just keep on walking.