

# Sermon Words for August 30, 2020

Text: Mt 16:21-28

Title: "Take Up Your Cross and Follow Me"

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1. After a long day's work, a fortune-teller came home and said to his wife, "What's for dinner?" His wife said, "You are a fortune teller. You are supposed to know what will be for dinner."
2. There are people in the world who claim to know what the future holds. In addition to fortune tellers, there are psychic mediums, tea leaf readers, Tarot card readers, and crystal ball readers who claim to have special insight to read the past, the present, and the future events.
3. I once visited an elderly woman who attended my previous church from time to time. While talking about psychic mediums, I said, "Fortune tellers and psychic mediums are all fake. They really don't know what they are talking about." She was not pleased to hear me say that because she said that she was a psychic medium. She said that she had helped local police to locate dead bodies a few times. I don't know how much she said was true but obviously I did not have the sixth sense that she might have been a psychic medium.
4. For your information, psychic reading, telepathy, and divination are called pseudoscience which means fake science or, should I say, half science. As we, human beings, are ignorant and fearful of what might happen in the future, there are people who take advantage of gullible people who want to cling to anything rather than nothing. The Bible warns of the dangers of these questionable people who mislead naïve and innocent folks.
5. Unlike these false foreseers, however, there were prophets in the Old Testament who predicted the future fate of their Jewish nation. Prophets like Jeremiah, Isaiah, Habakkuk and Malachi delivered God's message to Hebrew people. They said, "Here is God's message for you. Repent your sins and turn to God. Stop worshipping false gods. Return to Jehovah, Yahweh God who saved you from Egyptian Pharaoh. Don't mistreat the poor and the powerless in your society. If you keep sinning against God, God is going to punish you. You will learn the lessons the hard way. Your country will be conquered by Babylonians and you will be dragged to Babylonia as captives. Shape up before it's too late. Otherwise, you will be shipped out to Babylon as slaves."

6. When God's messengers delivered God's message, one would think that people would listen to them and obey them. Sadly, Hebrew people did not listen to the prophets and accepted God's message. Instead, Jewish people attacked the prophets, beat them, and threw them into prison. More often than not, that was the fate of prophets.

7. John the Baptist was a prophet in Jesus's time. He delivered God's message to Jewish people. He preached, "Repent your sins and be baptized, for the kingdom of God is at hand." He told the truth to King Herod, saying "You stole your brother's wife. That's not cool with God." What happened to John? King Herod killed him. Telling the truth is a dangerous job. I read a book written by a retired pastor. The title of the book was, "Ten Things I Wanted to Say to My Congregation When I Was a Pastor But I Couldn't Because I Needed a Job."

8. Jesus came from this long line of Jewish tradition of prophets. Like prophets in the Old Testament, Jesus delivered God's message to Jewish people. Jesus said, "The laws of Moses are important. But love for God and love for people are more important. Give taxes to the Roman government. But give your heart and soul to God. Tip your hat off to the political leaders but do not worship them. They are only human beings. Worship only God. You are resident aliens in this world. Your permanent citizenship is in heaven and in the kingdom of God."

9. Jesus was often in conflict with religious leaders of his time. Jewish priests were critical of Jesus's liberal and progressive interpretation of the Bible because Jesus often said, "You have heard Moses say such and such but I say to you. For example, Jesus said, "You have heard Moses say "Keep the Sabbath holy!" But I say to you, "Sabbath was made for people, not the other way around."

10. Jesus also said, "You have heard Moses say, "Love your friends but hate your enemies. But I say to you, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you." Jesus was a conservative who wanted to conserve the greatest commandment of all, "Love God and Love people."

11. Nonetheless, Jewish religious leaders did not like Jesus. They called Jesus "a blasphemous, demon-possessed, crazy heretic." High priests wanted to get rid of Jesus. Political leaders did not like Jesus, either. They thought that Jesus was a troublemaker, rabble-rouser, cult leader, or revolutionary. They felt that Jesus posed a threat to the status quo of the Roman empire. They decided to kill Jesus on the cross.

12. Jesus knew that he was on a collision course with people in power. Jesus was at the crossroads whether he would follow God's will and get killed or he would bow down to

powerful people and save his neck. He was in deep agony when he was praying over his fate. He prayed to God, "Father, let this cup pass by me. But not my will but YOUR will be done."

13. After this prayer, Jesus made up his mind to follow God's will at all cost. He shared his plan with his disciples, saying, "I am going to go to Jerusalem. There I will be arrested, tortured and killed." Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, don't talk like that. This shouldn't happen to you." Jesus clearly said, "Peter, you are thinking on human things, not on divine things." For Jesus, there is more to life than safety, security, and saving his neck. For Jesus, standing up for God was worth giving his life.

14. And then Jesus said to his disciples, "You are not off the hook. If you wish to follow me, you must take up your cross and follow me." Secular people may follow money, power, and fame as their God. But disciples of Jesus must stand up for God, for truth, and for justice. Secular people may ask, "What's in it for me?" But Christians must ask, "What's the right thing to do for God and for humanity?" Secular people want more privileges than others. Christians must want others to enjoy the same privileges. Secular people want to believe that their race is superior to other races. Christians must believe that God created us all equal and we are all brothers and sisters in God.

15. As Jesus carried his cross of self-denial and total submission to God's will, we, his followers, are to be willing to sacrifice our privileges to benefit the under-privileged people in our society.

16. When Blacks are killed by police brutality, Christians must speak up, "Black lives matter as much as White Lives." When protesters burn police cars, Christians must speak up, "Blue Lives matter as much as Black lives and White lives. Violence makes things worse, not better." When innocent people get killed, Christians are not to look the other way and pretend nothing had happened. Sometimes silence is complicity and cowardice. In this hate-filled, violence-infested world, we, Christians, are called to work for justice and peace. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peace-makers."

17. Following Jesus is not an easy walk in the park. It's the road less travelled. Not many people want to walk in this narrow path of self-denial and self-sacrifice. But this narrow path will lead us to an eternal, meaningful life, Jesus said, "If you forsake God's will to save your neck, you will lose your soul. But if you sacrifice your life for God's will, you will gain eternal life."