



**St John's United Church of Christ
Pastor's Lenten Devotion / Prayer for
The Second Week of Lent
Wednesday, March 3, 2021 7:00 pm**

Greetings St John's Family,

This week's gospel reading is a powerful message from Jesus about what defines his committed followers. As you and I go through this season of Lent, we're called upon to examine our spiritual condition. What would our "followership" if you will, of Jesus look like if we were to take it to a deeper level?

Please read this passage carefully from Mark 8: 31-35. ³¹Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³²He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

³⁴He 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. ³⁵For 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.”

Jesus tells his disciples that his earthly mission will result in his death. He also mentions his resurrection to life three days later but I’m thinking they didn’t understand, at that time, what he meant by that. This was shocking news to them. The one whom they’d given up everything to follow said he was going to die.

Do you ever get upset when things turn out very different than you expected? Our reaction is often like Peter’s reaction. “No way! This can’t happen. I won’t stand for it.” Jesus’ response to Peter is, “Get behind me, Satan!” That’s another way of saying “don’t mess with God’s plan!”

Jesus chooses this moment to tell them clearly what he expects of his followers. “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.”

What kind of life does a follower of Jesus live? The call to follow Jesus is a call to “walk in his shoes.” It is to live with the same purpose and love that he did when he walked this earth.

A man named John lay in a hospital bed, impatient and bored. Doctors said he would be there for at least 10 days while they tried to diagnose his abdominal pain. The discomfort was mostly gone, though, and he was more than ready to go home. At 4:00 a.m. he was awakened by a nurse checking his temperature and blood pressure.

Unable to get back to sleep, he decided to take a walk. So, tethered to an I.V. pole, he made his way along the deserted corridor with the thing rattling beside him on its tiny wheels, his Birkenstock sandals flopping on the floor. At the nurses' desk was a young woman at her computer. On his earlier walks she had not even glanced up, but now she turned from the screen and smiled. "Here comes the man in the Jesus shoes," she said. John laughed for the first time in days. "Jesus shoes?"

"That's my husband's name for Birkenstocks," she explained. John looked down at his brown sandals with the broad bands of leather across his feet; indeed they did look like the shoes you see in paintings of Jesus and the Disciples. They talked for a few minutes. The nurse told him she had been working 14 hours non-stop: She and her husband both worked overtime just to make ends meet. Feeling less sorry for himself, he resumed his walk. With his sandals clomping along beneath him he wondered if he could turn the long days in the hospital into a unique experience...he would walk in Jesus' footsteps while his own life got back to normal. From that day on, he walked the halls of the hospital in a different mood. Most of the time he didn't talk about God or pray aloud with people, but he always prayed silently. And he listened with new attentiveness. It was astonishing how often doctors and nurses, other patients, visitors, volunteers and cleaning staff would bring up personal matters as he walked in his "Jesus shoes." Of course, the difference was interior. Instead of focusing on his own problems, he became more concerned, like Jesus would, with other people.

Do you have your Jesus shoes on? Perhaps you might remember this when you put your shoes on in the morning. Think about His call for us to lose our worries and self-concerns and as we direct our focus towards the well-being of others and in doing so, we find what we've truly been looking for all along.

Prayer: Dear God, we open our hearts to your love and wisdom in this season of Lent. In this time of pandemic, we continue to offer prayers for all those affected. We offer prayers for those who are lonely, distressed, or going through challenging times right now. We offer prayers that we would hear your call to deny ourselves, take up your cross, and follow you as we seek to "walk in your shoes". Amen.

Blessings!

Pastor Jeff Johnson

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