

# Discipleship Moment

Sermon Text: Mark 5:21-24, 35-43

As we celebrated All Saints Sunday this weekend memories flooded many of us in the congregation—the painful and tragic death of a friend or spouse or the slow and painful death of a parent or grandparent—we long to see and talk to those that we have lost this year. The long walk down the center aisle of the sanctuary while the bell rang out in memory of the one who died is a powerful moment in the life of our congregation. Then we heard the Word of God. Pastor Ben proclaimed the promise of God that, in Jesus, we may die in the flesh, but this death is not the final word. In fact, by the power of Jesus, we will come back to life, just like the little girl, Jairus' daughter, in the Gospel lesson. This story gives us hope—amid our failing bodies, sickness, accidents, we might be killed but that death is not the last word, in fact, in the end we will be resurrected and brought into the presence of Jesus and the Father forever.

But here's the hard part—in order to have resurrection there must be death. You can't be resurrected if you are not dead. Because of this Pastor Ben proclaimed to us this truth: Christ brings transformation through death. How can this be? Isn't death the ultimate destruction? Isn't death the annihilation of the person? Didn't Jesus come to earth to bring life, and life abundantly (John 10:10)?

The answer is yes; yes, Jesus did come to bring life. And yes, death is destruction. But, the work of Jesus Christ was to use destruction as a tool. He took on the death of humans as his own, died, was buried in order to suffer in the destruction of humans. But he came back; he rose again. He took on death and defeated. He came through on the other side. He did what other humans couldn't: suffer death and come out unscathed. Now he has opened the way for all of us to experience life after death.

So here we are: faced with the death of Jesus and the hope of the resurrection. And then we get a command from Jesus like this "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it" (Mark 8:34b-35). Jesus tells us in stark words here that in order to follow him we must choose death, at least a type of death. In order to follow Jesus we choose the way of dying. What kind of dying is Jesus talking about? I call it little death. Big death is the end of our life, the experience we will all have. But little death is a choice. It is choosing to put my desires to the side and take care of my wife, that is a little death: my desires and my needs are killed in order to provide life to my wife. A little death is choosing to respond with gentleness when your boss or coworker gets cross with you during the day: your desire for retribution is dying. Another way to experience this little death is by using our resources and time to help others in their distress: our need for security is dying, and our hearts are opened to others, making us more compassionate and wiser.

Death is a tool for transformation. But we can't just wait until we're old and sick to experience this transformation. Jesus expects us to begin dying *now*; by laying down our life for others, by sacrificing my wants and needs for others, and by intentionally withholding comfort from myself I am dying a little death. *This* is the kind of death that produces transformation in our lives. If you want resurrection, then you must die. If you want resurrection *now*—transformation *now*—then you must begin to die *now* by killing your desires and your sins.

## Going Deeper

1. Have you lost a loved one recently? Or do you have a sick loved one? How does it make you feel?
2. Why do you think it is so hard to lose a loved one?
3. When someone lies about you or mistreats you, do you have a similar response? Why do you respond to sin the way you do?
4. What do you think it means to "pick up your cross" and follow Jesus? Why would Jesus say that?
5. If Jesus called you to follow him today, what would he ask you to give up? What would he tell you to get rid of to follow him? Safety? Security? Money? Sports? Gambling? Alcohol? Your family?
6. Ask God to help you kill those things in your life so you can experience transformation.