

## Built Around the Cross Sermon from 2/24/24

"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" says Jesus to the crowds.

What does that mean in today's world to deny ourselves and take up the cross and follow Jesus?

According to Mickey Anders, There's a great story about the French Sculpter Auguste Rodin, the one who sculpted the famous piece, "The Thinker".

One day, Rodin saw a huge, carved crucifix beside a road. He immediately loved the artwork and insisted on having it for himself. He purchased the cross and arranged to have it carted back to his house. But, unfortunately, it was too big for the building. So, of all things, he knocked out the walls, raised the roof, and rebuilt his home around the cross.

This is a powerful image. When you hear Jesus' call to radical discipleship, may you knock down the walls and rebuild your life around the cross.

The cross was an instrument of death for the Roman empire. It meant suffering and death. But after the resurrection of Jesus, the cross took on a new meaning. Jesus' victory over death and the grave revealed hope in the cross... that God was indeed saving the world through the cross of Jesus. Today we wear cross necklaces, have cross tattoos, and adorn our houses with crosses as a symbol of hope.

The cross shows us a way through our suffering. The cross gives us strength when we are weak. The cross helps us to overcome times when we are rejected, insulted, or face injustices. We have a God in Jesus who went through the cross and who doesn't abandon us, but walks with us through our cross moments in life.

**To Deny oneself means to say "no" to ourselves.** It is to disown oneself, to turn away from the idolatry of self-centeredness. Our

human condition says that we are always thinking of ourselves and what is best for us. One of the definitions of sin is to be turned in on oneself. We live in a world of instant gratification. We don't deny ourselves very often. We want it our way right away. And if we can't afford it, we charge it.

**To take up your cross**, at least in Jesus' time, meant to pick up the cross beam and carry it to the place where they would be hung up. Criminals would often carry their own cross beam. The walk would bring on public shame and insult. Taking up your cross today shouldn't be a fatalistic thing. Oh that is just my cross to bear. Taking up your cross and following Jesus is a call and a choice. It is a new way of life. It means living a life of service.

**To follow me** means to follow Jesus where he goes. It reminds me of a mama duck and her ducklings. If the mama duck sharply turns in the water to avoid danger, the ducklings follow after. Following Jesus means acting on his teachings like do unto others as you would have them do unto you or to love one another as Jesus loved us.

Following Jesus through the cross means to live a servant life. Jesus didn't come to be served but to serve. We aren't on this earth to be served but to serve. And we won't do this perfectly. Look at the disciples how they abandoned Jesus and Peter denied Jesus three times. But even then there was grace.

The promise is when you deny yourself, take up the cross, and follow Jesus you will find your life. You will find meaning and purpose. Serving others in small or big ways... aka... building your life around the cross will set you free from the ways of this world that draw you from God. I like to say, "When in doubt... get out." Get out and serve, use your precious gifts and time to help others. You can serve anywhere... at home, at school, at the local café, in a hospital bed, in church, in your neighborhood, or in places like Guatemala. There you will find Jesus. Amen!

