

“Rediscover Your ‘True-Self’ in Christ”

Psalm 22:23-31, Mark 8: 31-38

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Last Sunday, we started off a new spiritual season of Lent remembering our spiritual identity as God’s beloved children. This is the center point of our Christian faith and the main focus of Jesus’ public ministry as Christ. Simply speaking, you matter to God’s eyes and know that you are precious children of God. This is why we follow Jesus and desire to discover our true self in him and his teachings. Jesus invites you to join his spiritual journey claiming “I am a precious child of God”. Indeed, our ultimate spiritual goal is to rediscover our ‘true self’ as we walk with Jesus. Then, how can we find our ‘true self’?

In today’s Scripture reading, especially in the gospel of Mark verse 34 to 35, we find a clue and answer in Jesus’ words, but it sounds somewhat strange. In our New Testament reading, Jesus says to his disciples in this way,

“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.” (NRSV)

Do you catch that? Jesus clearly mentions, “You must deny yourself in order to come with me.” How does “the practice of denying ourselves” have something to do with discovering our ‘true self’ in Christ? I chose my sermon title, “Discover your ‘True Self’ in Christ”, but ‘Self-Denial practice’ will be even better to explain Jesus’ point. What on earth does it mean to deny ourselves?

Let us recall the main purpose of Jesus’ public ministry, his life, death and resurrection. His entire life dedication, mission, teachings and even sacrificial act of love were focused to change people’s understandings of God. His ministry was all about the love of God through a spiritual renewal movement within Judaism’s culture. When Israel religious leaders were trying to protect and keep their own God in their territory, Jesus wanted to liberate God from Judaism to everyone. His message, life and teachings challenged the Israel leaders’ religious beliefs and their system. Therefore, they wanted to kill him on a cross. As we know, Jesus humbly died on the cross not because he couldn’t help himself, but he chose to *surrender his life to God*. In other words, Jesus *emptied himself* being born in human likeness and he became obedient to the point of death. Spiritually speaking, death is a metaphor of total ‘denial practice’

and ‘surrender’ to God. Truly, Jesus was the example to deny himself humbly before God.

A while ago, I shared an illustration of ‘denial ourselves’ using an image of a cup. A cup is a container for holding something. Whatever it holds has to eventually *be emptied out* so that something more can be put in. There has to be some emptying, some pouring out, if I am to make room for the new. The spiritual practice of ‘denying ourselves’ is like that – a constant process of emptying and filling, of giving and receiving, of accepting and letting go.¹ Jesus emptied himself, then God raised him from death to life. At the last moment of his life, Jesus yielded up his spirit to God. To deny ourselves is hard to do, but we have to deny ourselves in order to be the new and to be full. Ask yourself if you are ready to be anew in God and to discover your authentic yourself in Christ. Jesus challenges us to replace an ‘old-being’ with a ‘new-being in Christ. How can we find a new being in Christ?

C.S Lewis, the author of *Mere Christianity* reminds us of the basic and essence in Christian faith: The Christian way is different: harder, and easier. Christ says,

Give me All. I don’t want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want You. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don’t want to cut off a branch here and a branch there, I want to have the whole tree down... I will give you a new self instead. I will give you Myself: my own will [shall]becomes yours.²

How is your soul? If your soul is like a cup, what things are filled in your cup? An early Christian Father, St. Augustine, reminded us that God speaks to us from our deep inside and we “hear” a God who speaks from within our very “selves”. We realize that our souls within us are filled with our stuff, even not any space for God at all. He advises us to examine ourselves and be aware how much stuff has occupied our souls. Denying ourselves is a spiritual premise that we acknowledge our limit of knowledge, confess our self-pride and self-centeredness attitude and turn to God for help. It is also a spiritual practice to hear God’s voice within us and to clean up ‘our cup’ to make space for God’s dwelling place within us. Simply speaking, we make room for God within us.

¹ From the *Cup of Our life* by Joyce Rupp.

² I found this quote here, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/761502-christ-says-give-me-all-i-don-t-want-so-much> Accessed Feb. 23 2018

Henri J. M. Nouwen, a Christian spiritual mystic, in his book, *A Spirituality of Homecoming* shares his spiritual insights of what it means to deny ourselves and follow Christ in the Christian spiritual journey,

Following Jesus does not mean imitating Jesus, copying his way of doing things. If we imitate someone, we are not developing an intimate relationship with that person. Instead, following Jesus means to give our own unique form, our own unique incarnation, to God's love. To follow Jesus means to live our lives as authentically as he lived his. It means to give away our ego and follow the God of love as Jesus shows us how to do it.³

Jesus Christ asks you and me to follow him. Over again, following Jesus is not passively following Jesus' footsteps but it requires you of choice to take a journey finding your authentic self as God created you in His own image. And it is a new spiritual journey to find our true self walking *with* Jesus. Let us continue to walk, explore and rediscover our true self together during this holy season of Lent. Amen.

³ I found this quote in this web page. <https://revlisad.com/2013/10/04/quotes-deny-yourself/> Accessed Feb. 23 2018