

WELCOME 23rd March 2025 – 3rd SUNDAY IN LENT '25 C

Luke 9:18-27 & Psalm 115:1-8 & 11-15

Welcome! What a blessing to be together again today! With your worship order you have in your hands **Bible Study Qs/Growing Praise** handouts... Those are provided to lead you deeper into God's word/work in your life, & help you share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our **Zoom Bible Study Catch-ups on Friday @ 1p.m.** ... Resume **THIS FRIDAY 28th March!**

As we move into this week... "Who do you say I am?" That's probably the most important question Jesus ever asked that you & I will ever answer. After asking about the crowds & their best guess, Jesus looked straight at those who knew him best... "Who do you say I am?"

But some Sunday School answer many of us can rattle off w/o a thought isn't how Jesus understood himself, his purpose/mission, or what that means for the world. He continued... "The Son of Man must suffer many terrible things. He will be rejected by the elders, the leading priests, & the teachers of religious law. He will be killed, but on the third day he will be raised from the dead."

Then he said to the crowd, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, & follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it."

Jesus is **EITHER** who he said he was & his death & resurrection change the shape of human life & the trajectory of all creation... **OR** we are adrift & lost in this life until life is no more.

Who do you say Jesus is? Would I know by the way I see him revealed in you?

If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it.
But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it."

*Whole-Hearted conviction follows Jesus
and carries its own cross daily.*

Let's pray...then explore & experience that together...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Hear this, everyone who thirsts, come to the water; & you who arrive empty-handed & heart-wounded...come...take & eat!

Wonderful God, you are our God, & today seek only you. Our spirits thirst for you, our minds long for you for your love is better than life itself!

Lord Jesus, love & sacrifice in our flesh...give us in this hour true & sincere hearts. Drive out anything fake in us, & overwhelm our fears with your presence so we trust you alone as your warmly loved & deeply treasured brothers & sisters... Through you Lord Jesus we pray...Amen!

LET'S SING & THEN HEAR GOD'S WORD...

FAITH CHAT:

1. In today's world, what do the people you know worship besides Jesus?
Why that? Given that @ any Sunday about 5-12% of Australians are in worship...
2. What do you think the Psalmist means when he says those who make or trust in "idols" "are just like them"?

3rd SUNDAY IN LENT '25 C – WHOLE-HEARTED CONVICTION

You've heard me quote GK Chesterton ^{b/4} who once noted: **When** people stop believing in God, they don't believe in nothing, they'll believe in anything. I was struck by another of his thoughts this past week: **Tolerance** is the virtue of those without conviction. Let's remember: conviction is the line-in-the-sand stake-in-the-ground firmly held non-negotiable belief that sets the pattern & purpose for your life. A **conviction** is what you bet your life on...a conviction is what for you is worth dying for or at least fighting to preserve. Beyond opinion...beyond best guess... beyond 'well that's ok for you but...' Conviction is what holds fast in you against every challenge.

About 12 yrs ago...**Judah** Smith, a pastor in Seattle created a website & put up billboards all over the city that simply said "**Jesus** is _____" The intent was much like Jesus & the 12 as we just heard. He & the team @ their church wanted to know what folks in Seattle thought about Jesus...The results were intriguing & became a **book**. Similar to what we heard in Luke's gospel, Seattle dwellers had a wide & often confused picture of Jesus. Even in Australia the answers on the website vary wildly ...**a crutch** ...**hard to believe**...**worth it**...**my GPS**...**the joy of living**...**better than Mt Panorama**...you get the idea...

As the scene opens in Lk 9 we see the same confusion...The crowds were fascinated by Jesus. They marveled @ his teaching...were gobsmacked by his miracles...blown away by his ability to turn his enemies' trick questions back against them...but mostly they were strangely drawn in...captivated by the warmth & genuine compassion that embraced the most broken among them & left each transformed in some way. Few walked away unchanged. *BUT...WHO IS HE?* The people in his hometown didn't know what to make of him. The religious experts were of divided opinion. His cousin, John the Baptist isn't sure. People he ate dinner w/ didn't know. King Herod didn't know. Not even the disciples saw clearly...

So the question comes...not just about the crowds but directly for those up close: "**Who** do you say I am?" Interestingly, the "you" is plural...**Who** do y'all say I am? So when Peter speaks, it seems the 12 & the women must have been talking among themselves & Peter took a shot at what seemed most likely: **You** are the Messiah sent from God!" Two things...1st – seems the 12 & the women & handful of others who travelled daily alongside Jesus are starting to connect the dots & are beginning to see a picture of Jesus as the one chosen by God to rescue & rule God's people & reveal to every nation God's sovereignty (rule over all things) so that all people might join in worshipping the One True God.

But 2nd...**Jesus** warned his disciples not to tell anyone who he was. So they got it right... or did they? Remember we've said ^{b/4} the Jewish people are under grinding Roman occupation/oppression. Many believed God would raise up the Messiah as a warrior-king like David to defeat the Romans & re-establish the great kingdom ruled by David & Solomon. Jesus cuts that speculation off ^{b/4} it can get started...so that the reality of God's Messiah can become clear **AND** what it will cost both Jesus & any who would follow him.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "The Son of Man must suffer many terrible things. He will be rejected by the elders, the leading priests, & the teachers of religious law. He will be killed, but on the third day he will be raised from the dead." The first thing...absolutely nothing about military, social, political or economic power in the hands of the Messiah or his followers. Nothing about wealth, happiness, kids who grow up to be dux & have great straight teeth. No hint of being insulated from life's hardships. But it **IS** a reminder & fulfilment of Isaiah's age-old promise: **He** was despised & rejected - a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief. We turned our backs on him & looked the other way. He was despised, & we did not care. Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down...he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sin. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed...the Lord laid on him the sin of us all. – Is 53:3-6

There is, only in Jesus' suffering, dying & rising the healing of the wound in the fabric of the universe & human life...the mortal wound of sin is made whole...**For** God's will was for us to be made holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all time...For by that one offering he forever made perfect (complete/whole) those who are being made holy. – Heb 10:10, 14 Why is that the only way? **Because** God's children are human beings—made of flesh & blood—the Son also became flesh & blood. For only as a human being could he die, & only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death. Only in this way could he set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying. – Heb 2:14-15 At the very end of this chapter Luke tells us, "As the time drew near for him to ascend to heaven, Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem." – Lk 9:51 Before the disciples truly get lost in their own preconceived misunderstandings or desires about the Messiah...who he is & what he will do...Jesus points to his suffering, death & victorious resurrection...He focuses his gaze & theirs toward his true mission, purpose & prize...to break the power of the devil...set free all who live as slaves to sin, fear, evil & death...establish once/for all the Bt @...justice/peace/righteousness...

And in doing that...all who are drawn to trust/faith in him will likewise become those whose lives imitate that same kind of self-giving sacrificial love for others. **Then** he said to the crowd, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, (deny yourself) take up your cross daily, & follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you

will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it." **NB:** Lk 9 begins w/ the 12 sent to do what Jesus did... **One** day Jesus called together his twelve disciples & gave them power & authority to cast out all demons & to heal all diseases. Then he sent them out to tell everyone about the Kingdom of God & to heal the sick... So they began their circuit of the villages, preaching the Good News & healing the sick... It continues here in the deeper explanation of what that mission doing what Jesus did will cost him **AND** all who follow him. Sacrificial love...self-denial...giving whatever it takes to see the life of Jesus born in someone else...cross-carrying are not part-time jobs...

Jesus is **EITHER** who he said he was & his death & resurrection change the shape of human life & the trajectory of all creation...**OR** we are adrift & lost in this life until life is no more. **AND** if Jesus is who he said he was then our lives **OF NECESSITY** will reflect **HIM** in our relinquishing control & ownership of all we have for the sake of the advance of his name here now... I was re-reading the story of **Jim** Elliot...American missionary killed w/ 4 others attempting to bring the story of Jesus to the Huaorani people of Ecuador in 1956. (top-end of Sth America)... As his team prepared to go to Ecuador his diary reflects he was well-aware of the dangers they faced & the risk his faith & this journey to which Christ had called him posed to himself & his relatively new marriage...He wrote, "**He** is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." Take a minute...make a brief list of all the things you can't keep into eternity...Whatever will not cross the threshold of heaven w/ you can be offered for the sake of Christ today...so that one more person might cross that threshold at your side in the arms of Christ. Eventually the Huaorani all became Xn...

In fact Paul would say it like this after inventorying his life: **Yes**, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ & become one with him....I want to know Christ & experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead! – Php 3:8-11 The underlined piece there seems to me to be the goal/heart of following Jesus...full oneness w/ Christ...unbroken uninhibited experience of his presence & power at work through me & the situations & circumstance, relationships & encounters in my life. Yes... including suffering in his name for his name...because I refuse to be quiet about his name.

To say "no" to me...my wants wishes whims & will so that Jesus can be more readily visible...because the alternative...**Their** idols are merely things of silver & gold, shaped by human hands. They have mouths but cannot speak, eyes but cannot see. They have ears but cannot hear, noses but cannot smell. They have hands but cannot feel, feet but cannot walk, & throats but cannot make a sound. Those who make idols are just like

them, as are all who trust in them. The alternative to life in the strength & power of Christ that triumphs over sin, death & evil is a life of unimagined impotence, powerlessness, fruitlessness & futility...as Jesus said, **I am** the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, & I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. – Jn 15:5 – living apart from Jesus is to be adrift & lost in life until life is no more.

The most important question Jesus ever asked that you & I will ever answer: "**Who** do you say I am?" It's a question that calls for conviction...the line-in-the-sand stake-in-the-ground firmly held non-negotiable belief that sets the pattern & purpose for your life. Jesus asks you on what you have bet your life...knowing that...

*Whole-Hearted conviction follows Jesus
and carries its own cross **daily**.*

As you leave today, be specific & share w/ your neighbour...

TAKE IT HOME

With whom this week will you share your conviction in Christ?
How will you demonstrate your firmly held non-negotiable belief in Jesus
that sets the pattern & purpose for your life?
(Be specific...How will this take shape in you?)

Prayer after the sermon...

Lord Jesus, you have taken hold of us by your dying & rising for us. Take hold of us again daily & lead us to trust nothing but you for satisfaction & fullness in this world & to offer back to you whatever you require of us so that others might be drawn in to your eternal embrace. Take all we have & all we are so those around us see you at work every day. Make our lives a living gospel, an unceasing proclamation of your love and our praise to you. Let your mighty love so fall on us that we have no choice but to tell the world what we have received freely in you from the Father's grace. We pray in your Name. Amen.