

**FIXER UPPER: Renovation of the Heart sermon series**  
**The Cost of Renovation (Mark 8:31-38)**  
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**February 28, 2021**

**WATCH/LISTEN:** [www.fbcjc.org/sermon/renovation-of-the-heart-the-cost-of-renovation](http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/renovation-of-the-heart-the-cost-of-renovation)

Some of you are old enough to remember 1986 movie, *The Money Pit*, starring Tom Hanks (Walter Fielding) and Shelley Long (Anna Crowley). Walter and Anna are a couple who purchase a large estate outside the big city, at price that's too good to be true. But the house immediately begins to fall apart. The entire front door frame rips off the front of the house, the main staircase collapses, the plumbing is full of gunk, the electrical system catches fire, their clawfoot bathtub crashes through the floor, the chimney collapses, and the list goes on. Problem after problem after problem.

If we're honest, life can feel this way sometimes, especially in the past year, like it is all just too much sometimes. Just because you or I are a Christian, doesn't mean you never feel overwhelmed or never experience difficult times. In fact, following Christ, allowing Christ to renovate our lives is intense and expensive work. Following Jesus is not some kind of magic wand, no cure-all for life's problems.

If we're being really honest, we sort of expect the magic wand. We want God's renovating work in our lives to be as easy and on-budget as it is on home renovation TV shows.

First, we need to acknowledge a prominent real-life theology. The prosperity gospel—the idea that God will bless you with health and wealth if you give enough money, think enough positive thoughts, and are faithful enough—is, to be blunt, disproven by what Jesus says in our passage today. Our faith, our thinking, our money do not earn us or get us anything from God. Jesus does not promise us health or wealth or any of the other stuff we can get fixated on. So, I'm not going to stand here today and tell you that Christ's renovating work in your life will result in health, wealth, shiny perfect things.

You may not consider yourself a prosperity gospel kind of person. But you do expect or hope to have some measure of peace, stability, and success in your life. You hope for relationships that are healthy, people you can count on. You'd like to feel loved and good enough every once in awhile. You'd like to feel like you have a handle on your life, that you're able to make some kind of positive impact. You may not expect Jesus to give you health or wealth, but if you're like me or anyone else, you do hope for peace, love, connection, and progress.

The tough thing about Jesus, about following Jesus, is that we aren't promised any of these things. That is the first thing that needs to be said about the cost of God's renovating work in our lives—it means giving up your demands, illusions, and expectations about God's work in your life.

This is what Jesus says to Peter in our text today, and to the other disciples. They come to Jesus with a certain set of hopes, expectations, and mistaken ideas about Jesus' ministry.

To be fair to Peter and the disciples, Jesus says plainly to them that he is the Messiah, Peter says out loud to Jesus that he believes Jesus is the Messiah just before today's verses. Messiah is a loaded word in the time of Jesus. There are all kinds of expectations and hopes tied up in the word "messiah."

Most of the people who followed Jesus around associated the word, the title, the identity of Messiah with **kingship, victory, and might**. People expected the Messiah to be a military and political victor, conquering Israel's conquerors. On Palm Sunday, a few weeks from now in the season of Lent, we'll remember Jesus' entry into the city of Jerusalem right before his death, this moment is the height of Messianic expectation that Jesus would be a political and military victor on behalf of God's people.

When Peter pulls Jesus aside to give him a talking to about what the Messiah's job is, Peter has good reason for doing so. We do the same thing. We have all kinds of expectation, and hopes, and mistaken ideas about the kind of renovating work we expect God to do in our lives and in the world.

What Jesus does for the disciples in today's passage is tell them what he will tell them a hundred more times, a truth they will struggle to understand. He is not a king, victor, or mighty Messiah. He will die a criminal's death. He will walk the path of suffering. He will not experience peace, stability, success, health, wealth, secure relationships, upward mobility. Jesus tells them that his ministry is the cross and to help them understand that the cross is their ministry too.

Jesus tries to help the disciples, and to help us, understand that suffering, humiliation, heartache, overwhelm do not mean that Jesus is missing the mark, do not mean that the disciples were missing the mark, and do not mean that we are missing the mark. This is hard news for the disciples to hear and it is hard for us to hear. Yet, it is the truth about the cost of God's renovating work in us. It gets messy before it gets better. Sometimes it feels like a train wreck, like are in over our heads, like Walter and Anna in the *Money Pit*. Usually, that is right about the time we are starting to get it, right about the time we are ready to experience God's renovating work in our lives.

In today's passage, Jesus offers the disciples and us the framework, the blueprint, the game plan. "Anyone who wants to follow me needs to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow me," Jesus says. Deny, take up your cross, follow me (v. 34). Probably not the three-step plan to achieve health and wealth you are imagining.

Next, Jesus unpacks what he means by deny yourself. "Anyone who wants 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."

There are three Greek words for the one English word "life". In the New Testament Greek there is bios-life (the physical body). There is psuche-life which is the interior life-- mind, emotion, and will/soul (where we get the word "psychology"). There is zoe-life, which is divine life, the life that comes from God; the highest form of physical, mental, or spiritual life. When 1 Timothy 6 talks about "the life that really is life" it's talking about zoe-life; the life that God desires to create in all of us in our exterior and interior worlds.

Our passage today refers to psuche-life (the mind, emotion, will/soul). This is what Jesus says his followers must disown, give up, deny, release. If a person wants to save their interior life, that person must release it, lay it down; pick up their cross, and follow Jesus. The second thing, therefore, that needs to be said about the cost of God's renovating work in our lives is that it costs us everything. Not only our bodies, actions, and words, but also our interior lives. Our thoughts, emotions, and soul.

The third thing that needs to be said about the cost of God's renovating work in our interior life, is that the things in your life that are places of struggle are the places that lead to transformation, to renovation—they are your cross. In the same way that the cross was Jesus' ministry, your cross is yours. Notice what Jesus invites you to do with your place of struggle, hurt, failure, pain, with your cross. He does not invite you to avoid it. He does not invite you to save up enough money to buy a different one. He does not wave a magic wand and remove it from you. Carrying your cross, relinquishing those tough things and places and thoughts and feelings and struggles to him is the cost of God's renovating work.

The the last thing that needs to be said about the cost of renovation is that Jesus is not asking you to pay anything he hasn't paid. Jesus is not asking you to go anywhere he has not gone, to do anything he hasn't done, or to endure anything he hasn't endured. So when Jesus tells us to release our psuche, we can remember the words of John 10:17 where Jesus says, "For this reason God loves me, because I lay down my (psuche), my life, in order to take it up again."

You see, this is what God does. This is how God is. Right there with us, in the middle of all of it. The command is not authoritarian, it's incarnational. Jesus bears the cost with us.

In the Protestant tradition, we don't often see crucifixes, which is the cross depicted with Jesus dying on it. You might notice in many Catholic churches, hospitals, or houses there are crucifixes. This is something I treasure about the Catholic tradition. My dad is Catholic and so I grew up going to mass when I visited him. At the front of his sanctuary is a large-scale, stunning crucifix. Because that imagery was part of my formative years, there is something that sticks with me about the crucifix. When I see the crucifix in my dad's church and then see it other places, it reminds me that any cross I'm carrying is one Jesus can identify with because he carries the cross too. Anything I'm struggling to work through and release—thoughts or feelings—he's been there too.

Jesus was a carpenter. I wonder if we could imagine today going with Jesus to his shop. All together, working through the afternoon on our crosses. Cutting them, sanding them, putting them together. Naming them, owning them, looking around the room and seeing that every single one of us has one. We have crosses inside our churches, but what if we had our own crosses to carry with us as a physical reminder?

I think these words by Paul Shupe are right on point:

"Perhaps what we need is a multitude of crosses, one for each of us, at the back door of our sanctuaries, to be taken up as we return to the world of home and family, work and commerce, service and play--symbols of the call to discipleship that we have heard and accept anew."

Only you and God truly understand what part of your life you need to release, what cross is yours to carry, what it looks like for you to follow Christ. Whatever that is, it results in you becoming more like Jesus on the inside and the outside, about forming your interior life to be like the interior life of Christ. The process of renovation is being formed in Christ for the sake of the world.

Today, if you are feeling overwhelmed, like a failure, or lost, it doesn't mean you're in the wrong place. It may be exactly the place where God can do God's transforming work.

This week, I encourage you to take time to think, pray, and write about God's transforming work in your life. What is the life you imagine with God? How is God renovating you today, from the inside out?