Wall Street United Church
A meditation with Doug Warren
April 10, 2011

"So, You Want to Follow Jesus?"
Mark 8:34-38 NLT

"So, you want to follow Jesus?"

For the next 4 minutes and 59.2 seconds I want to talk primarily to you who have made the decision – either to be baptized, confirmed, to get a letter of transfer from a former church, or to profess your faith in Christ as Saviour. And, in doing so, you have said that you want to be a follower of Jesus here at Wall Street United Church. I feel like saying "hooray" or something more liturgical like "hallelujah!" (Which incidentally, according to some traditions, we're supposed to suppress until Easter Sunday! I don't know about you, but I can't sit on all my hallelujahs for 40 days!) This is mainly for new members, but everyone else may listen in. I hope when the vows were being made you too were able to renew *your* vows as well.

Joining Wall Street is something that *I* would do if I were in your shoes. I believe that this historic and beautiful building is really a vibrant, exciting ministry opportunity where God's love is not only talked about, but is felt by everyone that comes through our doors. It isn't the building that draws me, however. It isn't even the great music and teaching. It is the fact that our tag line, "God loves ALL. So do we!" is more than just words. All of us are changed for the good as we meet each week, and together experience the transforming presence of the living Jesus Christ.

It's a good decision you've made. And I can already feel the energy and love that you bring to the family. But I want to remind you of the message that Pastor Kim brought last week from the Gospel of Matthew. I'm going to read from the Gospel of Mark, the same message from Jesus, but from a different translation – the New Living Translation.

(here Jimmy shoulders the Cross and walks across the front of the church)

> Then, calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and 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 and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul? Mark 8:34-37 NLT

As I was reading this for the umpteenth time, a song kept going through my mind. Some of you will recognize it even when I sing it off key:

"I beg your pardon, I never promised you a rose garden. Along with the sunshine there's gotta be a little rain sometime …." (Sorry for the affront to your ears. Lynn Anderson I am not! But … I'm guessing this is an historic moment: the first time "I Never Promised You a Rose Garden" has been

sung from this pulpit! Also, it is the first time in 70 years that I've sung a solo in public, anywhere, anytime!)

Seriously: following Jesus isn't a rose garden without the rain. Following Jesus isn't all fluff and fellowship, teas, and potlucks. Following Jesus, in *His* own words involves a cross. As Pastor Kim said last week, it's not Jesus' cross that He's asking us to carry. It's your cross, whatever that is. (Next Sunday night at Celebrate Life I'll share what my cross has been). *Everyone* has a cross – one on which the old "me, myself and I" needs to die. As long as it is "all about us", as long as our focus is on '*saving*', holding onto our lives, Jesus says, we will end up losing them. Pretty blunt talk.

Let me read you The Message's paraphrase of Jesus' words:

> "Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat; I am. Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I'll show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to saving yourself, your true self. What good would it do to get everything you want and lose you, the real you? What could you ever trade your soul for?" Mark 8:34-37 Msg

The cross our youth made, and that Jimmy carried was not the "Old Rugged Cross," the cross that Jesus carried. Nor was it made of Styrofoam. It was heavy, real wood, the real thing, right Jim? I think it is very appropriate that our youth made it for this Easter, helping us to understand that as brightly, diversely coloured and attractive as it is, the cross still is an instrument of death. I wear a cross around my neck. It rarely leaves my body. Many of you do as well. I have never seen a gallows, or a guillotine used as jewelry around peoples' necks. Have you? Yet despite what the cross signifies, it is worn by many. My cross reminds me that it is not about me, but rather it is about Him. It's about Jesus.

Paul said:

> My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20 NLT

I think *that's* what being a follower of Jesus is all about.