

**Fourth Sunday After Pentecost – June 24, 2007
St Andrew’s Episcopal Church, Mullens, WV
“Take up your cross daily”**

The Rev. Kent Higgins

From the Gospel: “²³ Then he said to them all, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. ²⁴ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it.”¹

For some of us, perhaps most of us, there are phrases that, when we hear them, trigger a memory or a reaction. In my case, “take up your cross” is one of those triggers. It brings to mind my grandmother Higgins who would, on occasion, sigh deeply. She would then take on a tone of voice that told anyone in earshot that she was deeply put upon by whatever was going on, but that she was going to deal with it as a good Christian woman would. “Ahhhhh,” Grandmother would say, “that’s just my cross to bear.”

And all those in her audience would nod their heads in agreement, for they, too, had crosses to bear in their lives. They had burdens that had come upon them unfairly, or that they had borne too long, or that really should have been shared with brothers or sisters or somebody else.

Which is all well and good, except that I don’t hear the Gospel message with quite the tone of suffering with which grandmother infused her statement.

¹ *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. Nashville : Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989, S. Lk 9:23-24

Oh, the Gospel does include sacrifice – I’m not trying to say that it doesn’t, but it is not, as I read it, sacrifice that brings on a long face. Instead it is the willing, and yes even joyous, undertaking of a person who wishes to be a follower of Jesus to take up your cross and show the love of Christ in your life.

The Gospel message calls us to reflect the love Jesus showed to us in his sacrifice on his cross, to reflect that love to others. And the way in which we do that involves putting ourselves in third place.

We don’t get to be “number one” in our own lives. You know the expression – “looking out for number one.” That’s not for us, not for those who wish to be followers of Jesus. “Number one” is reserved for God and for no other.

We don’t get to take second place either. That’s reserved for our neighbors, And you know that “neighbor” for a Christian extends far beyond the person sitting in the pew next to you, or the person who lives next door, even far beyond people whom you personally know. The statement of losing your life in order to save it has full expression in the statement “you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your mind, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

So if we do as Jesus commands, we find ourselves in third place, having diminished ourselves, our pride, having stopped focusing on “me, me, me,” we find ourselves, holding our crosses high, not burdened by them, showing the love of Christ to all the world. But that’s fine, for remember the first shall be last and the last shall be first in the kingdom of God.

And remember also, “for inasmuch as you have done it unto the least of these, you have done it unto me.” So do not be burdened by the cross of Christ. He carries it for us. Our task is to show his love to others. We can do that!