

**Mark 8:31-38 (NRSV)**

31 Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

32 He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

33 But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

34 He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

35 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.

36 For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?

37 Indeed, what can they give in return for their life?

38 Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

**FOLLOW ME**

I've been listening to **This American Life** lately, which is a combination of podcast and radio.

It's easy to read and listen to **because** they provide transcripts **as well as** the voices of the cast and guests.

**The** other day, I was introduced to an interesting podcast **by a teacher who knew this podcast**. It was a story that started with a comparison between the word depression.

(I can't share all the stories from the podcast today. I'll post my sermon on the church website for the relevant podcasts, and I'll post links to them, and I can email them to anyone who needs them. [LINK HERE](#))

It was about a woman named Valerie and her mom, who immigrated to the United States from Russia as a child.

When Valerie was in school, a teacher looked at her writing and thought she might be depressed,

**so the teacher talked to her Mom.**

When the teacher asked about mental illness or trauma in their family history, her Mom said she felt bad (because of the cultural distinction).

On the way home, (Mom) she explained to her daughter that depression was **a stupid word and the symptoms were only for Americans**. Her husband, too, asked his daughter, "Why is there depression in America, where we live a life of prosperity?"

There are cultures, especially those who grew up in socialist countries, where talk of depression is a taboo because they strive for perfection, so the word depression not acceptable to them.

It's very mysterious to experience a new word that doesn't have an exact translation.

Valerie and her mom have argued a lot since then. She criticized her daughter for having depression, telling her that it comes from her thoughts and isn't real.

Why was her mom so negative about depression? Valerie says it's because of her parents' experiences in a socialist country. People with mental illness were socially stigmatized because in a perfect, exemplary society, mental illness had no place, and therefore depression could not exist.

If **depression is a lack of desire**, then **rocka is understood as a desire for something unattainable**, which is why we say that rocka is a word that only Russian Americans can understand.

At the end of this podcast, there's a conversation between a mother and daughter. The mother tells her daughter that she's depressed, and the daughter redirects the conversation by telling her mother that she's feeling toska. Now, the mom understands the daughter and the daughter understands the mom.

Listening to this podcast, it occurred to me that humans are creatures who express what's inside of them through things like writing and speaking, painting and singing, movement and resting, dancing and music, which means that writing and speaking are very limited ways of describing ourselves.

When you go to a country where English is not spoken, you realize how limited our skills for writing and speaking are, and that's when dance and music might be a better way to communicate.

Today's Bible passage is actually the climax of a struggle between Jesus and his disciples. Peter rebuked Jesus, and we can assume that the other eleven disciples had similar or the same thoughts. Mark's gospel emphasizes that Jesus' twelve disciples didn't fully understand where Jesus was going, especially after chapter 8 today.

(Human language is not perfect at describing things; I think philosophers could spend a lifetime just comparing and contrasting their definitions of words, and in some ways, academia is all about arguing: fitting and defending certain views and phenomena into the logic of one's argument.)

In the text we read today, Jesus tells his disciples to follow him. He doesn't tell them to study languages, he doesn't tell them to read books, he tells them to follow him, and he tells them how to follow him and they followed him.

In the end, it seems to me that Jesus' teachings make sense only if you follow him.

In fact, Jesus' disciples, the people who would have known him better than anyone else, are rebuking him. If that's the case, what does it mean for you and me today, for you and me who never met the historical Jesus, to follow him?

Sometimes ridiculous practices may be what Jesus meant.  
Sometimes what I don't want might be what Jesus wants to do.  
Because Jesus' teachings go beyond language.

So, you and I live in a time when we need to be imaginative. If Jesus were here today, what path would he take? What would his "follow me" mean? How would we interpret and apply it?

I think we need to be constantly sharing and talking about this, but also practicing and evaluating it together.

When I first came to Westwood Church, I was very impressed with the food distribution and the thrift shop. It was great to see people in need come in and get food and inexpensive things, and as I was talking to the people who came in, I thought, "What if we could have food and talk with them?"

Gosh, I'm a pastor, so all I have to do is focus on doing a great Sunday service, but in the back of my mind, I had a WWJD (What Would Jesus Do) thought: Would it be enough to just preach, lead worship, visit with members, and provide pastoral care? I think Jesus would have told me to do more.

Then it occurred to me that a good ministry I could do would be to cook and share food with people. I'm not a foodie, but I thought that if I could learn and share food, I would be following the way of Jesus.

In this day and time, people are hesitant to come to church. There are many reasons for this, but what we feel from reading the Bible is that Jesus went around with his disciples to meet people. He met people in many different ways. If you live in the United States today and knock on every door, people might call the police, so this is not a method that Jesus would use.

However, eating a meal together seems to suggest a good encounter. Church seems to be an appropriate way to use it. Jesus told us to follow him, and what he did was meet people where they were. He comforted them, he fed them, he proclaimed them to be children of God. I don't think what we do today is much different.

In today's devotional, I'm going to give you some practical applications for you to apply. Will you share with us your recipe for a beautiful dish from your kitchen? Let us pray.

Meditate on what it means to follow the ways of Jesus. You may have a profound philosophical realization that might involve religious sanctification and ecstasy for you personally. But we see people around us who are struggling. We see people who need not only food, but also someone to talk to. Perhaps, if Jesus were to come to Westwood, he would spend a lot of time meeting with people. Send us those who need comfort, send us those who need conversation, and let us serve them as Jesus served his disciples. Share the Good News! In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.