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Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

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Communion Sunday

Mark 8:34

Prayer: *Father, I just again, I thank you and again this is just a tiny, tiny taste of the inconvenience that we are experiencing which so many of your people experience throughout the world for you; and Lord, it just reminds us of the blessings that we have and the blessings that we enjoy. So this morning, Lord, as we are again coming before you on this communion Sunday, I just pray that you would give us the ability to enter into what it is you've done for us, the ability to experience it to a newer and deeper level, I pray, and I pray that we would be able to offer worship to you that is acceptable for that. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well again, this is that day that we remember Christ and his cross. And again, each time we go immediately to what the scriptures say about that night before he died where he met with his disciples for the last Passover supper with them, and this is *Matthew 26*. It says: *Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given*

thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

So Jesus took bread and he took wine and he offered them up as symbols of his flesh and his blood then he asked his disciples to do the same thing, to eat the bread and drink the cup in order to symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood. And then he asked them to repeat this remembrance of his sacrifice on a regular basis. This is what we call "the Lord's table." And so we celebrate the Lord's table once a month and we do that by meditating on what it is the Lord Jesus did for us on the cross, by then examining ourselves, asking God's Holy Spirit to point out areas in our life where he's convicting us of sin, by confessing those sins and then by participating in the elements. *John 6:53 says: So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."*

Well we've been following the life of Christ in the gospel of Mark, and last time we looked at Jesus' rebuke of Peter. If you remember, Jesus had just begun to explain to the disciples the

particulars of his upcoming crucifixion. *Mark 8 says: And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. Well, Peter just couldn't fathom the depths to which Jesus would go in order to rescue his sheep. Mark tells us that Peter absolutely knew that Jesus was the Christ. What he didn't know was what the Christ intended to do in coming to earth. He still thought of the Christ as someone who would come to free Israel from the oppressive rule of Rome. Again, remember Peter's the one who took out his sword, he's the one who cut off the ear of that soldier in the garden of Gethsemane. He still had a great deal to learn about the difference in being freed from the oppression of Rome and being freed from the oppression of sin and the evil one himself. All Peter could think about was his own personal loss and grief at the death of his vision of what the Messiah would bring. Peter no doubt thought at long last of the power and the glory, and the honor for his Lord and himself and here's Jesus telling him: *That the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly.**

So Peter sees two things happening simultaneously: one, the person

that he loved more dearly than anyone else on this earth is describing in detail just how his execution is going to unfold; and two, along with that execution would come the death of Peter's vision. It seems like Peter never heard the "*after three days rise again*" part, he focused solely on the crucifixion part, and all he could see was the death of his loved one and three years of preparation just going right down the drain. I mean, the good guys were going to lose and the bad guys were going to win. And so he saw these dreams that he had of ruling with Jesus, this new Messiah, he saw them crumbling before his eyes and he panicked. And Matthew tells us: *And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you."* Well now under normal circumstances, this is just the reaction that you would expect after hearing this awful news from Jesus, but Jesus knew far more about Peter than even Peter did. Jesus knew Peter's heart and his motivation and he wouldn't have it. *Mark 8:33* says: *But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."*

Now understand, Jesus didn't rebuke Peter because he got his facts wrong. He rebuked him because he had his mind set on earthly things. I mean how many times have you and I gotten into our heads how we think things are supposed to go, how we think they must go

if God truly does care for us like we think he does. I mean how many times have those plans been dashed being not at all of the kingdom but firmly rooted and grounded in this earth? You know, some of the greatest answers to prayer that I've ever had has been God saying a firm and fast "no" to something that I thought, just like Peter, was good and honorable and just and wise and which time showed to be anything but that. And so Jesus uses the circumstance as a teaching moment not just for the disciples but also for those who had been following him. *Mark 8:34* says: *And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."* So within a period of minutes, Peter's gone from being a spokesman for God declaring that Jesus is the Christ to an inadvertent spokesman for Satan, demanding that Christ forsake the cross to now where he hears Jesus describing the three things necessary to become one of his followers, *"let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me."*

First, let him deny himself. Warren Wiersbe said this, he said: "Denying self is not the same as self-denial. We practice self-denial when, for a good purpose, we occasionally give up things or activities. But we deny self when we surrender ourselves to Christ and determine to obey His will." You see, our self is that little voice inside each of us, it's that little voice that tries to

convince us that it has our best interests at heart, and it doesn't. It's the little voice that tells you that nobody, nobody is more important than you, that you are owed respect and love and health and pleasure and everything else that this world has to offer. My guess is that little voice got birthed first in Adam and Eve right after they ate that forbidden fruit. This is what it says in Genesis. It says: *So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked.* That's just a bizarre response. I mean, their first response to sin, the very first time it ever happens is the shame of nakedness. That's so strange. And you know that shame lingers even today. Nakedness is one of those great psychological terrors that people still have nightmares about, you know, showing up for work or being in class, suddenly discovering that you're naked. Scripture describes it as a form of punishment. Isaiah describes the humiliation that Babylon will experience by saying in *Isaiah 47:3: Your nakedness shall be uncovered, and your disgrace shall be seen. I will take vengeance, and I will spare no one.* We have Jesus counseling the churches in *Revelation 3*. He says: *I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of*

your nakedness may not be seen.

Understand, this is something that most definitely was not the way things were at the beginning. Prior to the fall nakedness was no cause for shame. Right after Adam and Eve were created -- for how long, we have no idea -- scripture says, *the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.* It says, *they ate the fruit and immediately thereafter then their eyes were opened, and they knew that they were naked.* You know, I've asked this question many times before, how could you possibly not know that you're naked? You know there's only one possible way that you can be naked and have no awareness of that and that's because you have no awareness of yourself. I mean they were not ashamed because they had no idea that nakedness, that it was even a thing. Selflessness was a natural state of being. And that also means that they had perfect other awareness. I mean there's only one couple who's ever lived who's ever had that privilege, and like I said, we have no idea how long they had it for, and that was Adam and Eve before the fall. But you know the second that their teeth touched that fruit, Satan's half-truth went into effect. Their eyes were indeed opened but it was nothing like they imagined. What they saw was the death of being perfectly other-centered and the birth of being self-centered.

I imagine that this first discovery of self was the awful precursor to all the effects that sin would have from that moment forward because sin is what happens when we put self in front of God. Adam and Eve quickly learned that when they put themselves above God. They gave birth almost instantaneously to self-centered, self-protective thinking. Think about it. Adam starts right off, what does he do, he blames the woman instead of himself. What does Eve do? Eve blames the serpent instead of herself, setting this precedent of selfishness that's continued from Eden to Port Jervis. I mean, stop and think about the people whom you most admire. Just think about the people you really would like to hang around. I can almost guarantee you that these are people who have been able to hear what Jesus is saying when he tells us to deny ourselves. These are folks who develop the ability to be other aware as opposed to people we think of as selfish or self-centered. When Jesus says that we have to deny ourselves, he's literally calling us back to Eden, to the attitude of the very first one of us before time began when we were even aware that we were naked. And it was a time literally before self existed. And ever since that time that Adam traded in our perfection we have been locked in this battle with self. So Jesus says the first part of following him is learning how to shut that little voice down. It gives us the best advise you could ever hear and it's taken from someone who knows exactly what he's talking about. *"If anyone would come after me,*

let him deny himself."

You see Jesus knows that that little voice within us that claims to care the most about us, that claims to be looking out for us actually wants nothing but our destruction. You know it would be one thing if the voice itself was honest, if it was simply giving you an honest assessment of yourself. Self doesn't operate that way. It is hopelessly biased in the worst possible direction because the voice behind it is the very same voice that convinced Adam and Eve that treason against God was justified because after all, God was hiding from them something they were entitled to, the knowledge of good and evil. And the more you listen to self, the more it's going to tell you how entitled you are, how unappreciated and how disrespected you are regardless your circumstance. And how do I know that? Well, I just figure if the enemy is able to convince the only two perfect humans who happen to be in an absolutely flawlessly perfect garden that they've been given complete autonomy over with one tiny exception, don't eat of that tree, well if the enemy of our souls can convince those perfect people in that perfect place that that limitation means they've been given the short end of the stick, I mean, how much easier do you think it is for us to tell that little voice inside us that we too deserve more, more consideration, more respect, more admiration, you name it. I mean, the list goes on and on. It

never stops.

Jesus alone understood what it was like to practice perfectly self-denial, and God through Paul calls on us to imitate Jesus's life-style. This is what he says in *Philippians 2*. He says: *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.* Jesus did nothing, nothing from selfish ambition or conceit. In fact, he was other consumed first for his Father and then for us. And so just ask yourself, ask yourself, have I ever done anything with absolutely no personal regard for any return whatsoever? Do I have any problem at all counting others as more significant than myself? Do I have a servant's heart? Again, I've said it many times, there's the old test that can tell you whether or not you have a servant's heart, and that's just examine how you feel when someone treats you like one.

I remember one particular failure of mine when it came to having a servant's heart. This was many, many years ago when I was in San Francisco working as a carpenter. I was with a group of four guys and we had just landed a really choice job. We got this remodeling job of a very fancy house in Pacific Heights which is the fanciest part of San Francisco. And the woman who hired us was an extraordinarily wealthy woman who knew it and wanted us to know it as well. She even talked like a wealthy woman, like she had adenoids, she said, "My people," stuff like that. We were working on her kitchen one day and all of us were in four different spots in a room and she shows up at the door with a friend of hers, just come in from the airport and drops her luggage. And she's showing all of the different parts of the work that's being done. And as they're walking out the door, she says to her friend, she says, "Just head on upstairs, I'll have one of my boys bring your luggage up." And she walks out of the room. Well, Dave the guy who's sitting right next to me, he looks around, he doesn't say a word, he just goes (shaking head negatively). It comes to me and I'm like (shaking head negatively). My partner Tom was the next day guy and he does exact same thing. Then it gets to this fellow John, John Robin, and he just gets a grin on his face, he shrugs his shoulders, walks over, picks up the bags and walks out of the room. I just think that it is amazing to me that only one of us understood what it meant to say in humility count others more

significant than yourselves, and he wasn't even a Christian. But you know something? He was the one that everyone wanted to hang out with because genuine selflessness is incredibly attractive. It's also hugely counterintuitive.

And if we all had this little voice inside us telling us to do exactly the opposite of what we should do, how do we know who to listen to? And where do we get the power to respond? Well, the first one is easy, am I looking out for myself or am I looking out for others? If it's self, God's directly telling us we are to deny self. But from where does the power to do that come from? Well, it comes from faith, not the theoretical spiritualized kind of faith but more the boots-on-the-ground certainty that God means what he says when he says he will be your protector and defender as long as you trust him and not yourself. And this is the way 1 Peter puts it in regard to how Jesus exercised that same faith. This is what he said, he said: *For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.*

So the key to denying self is the ability to trust that God will

provide everything you think you will lose by denying yourself. And that he's got the power, the will and the desire to effect every single aspect of my life. *Psalm 91* says: *He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."* You see, the boots-on-the-ground faith part comes from truly believing that you do in fact dwell in the shelter of the Most High. And if you can just trust yourself to him who judges justly, then you don't have to spend all of your energy looking out for number one.

A strange thing about denying yourself is that it seems like a death sentence, like, God, you're telling me to shut down the only voice inside me that's looking out for me. Well that little voice ever since Adam has convinced us that we need to listen to it in order to find our place in the world and yet we find that when God says, "Let it die" and we're actually able to do that, then we find two new realities. We find first a resurrected self that cares more about what God thinks and guess what, a world that finds us far more attractive. I mean we move from selfish to selfless as we move from Christ-less to Christ-like. In fact if the gospel doesn't make you far more attractive just as a human being then something is clearly wrong with your understanding of that gospel. The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,

goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Those are nine different forms of self-denial and they come from the Holy Spirit who takes up residence inside born-again believers. And the Spirit's goal is to sanctify us by conforming us to the image of the ultimate self-denier who is Jesus Christ, who said: *"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."* It therefore follows that selflessness should be growing within us as selfishness and self-centeredness are denied. And that's what we need a checkup for. That's one of the purposes of communion. It's to kind of stop, ask myself, how am I doing spiritually? So this morning I just want us to take a little bit of time before we participate of the bread and ask ourselves, how is our self-denial doing?

Let me just read to you from 1 Corinthians about how we prepare for this. This is 1 Corinthians 11:28. It says: *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.*

So you know every month I give you the very same warning. I said communion is an extremely serious undertaking and to enter into it in an unworthy manner as to literally court disaster. And once again, I just call out if you're not absolutely confident you're a child of the King, if you haven't by faith trusted in Christ as your Savior, or if you first need to be reconciled to your brother or sister before you bring the sacrifice of yourself to this altar, then don't participate; just pass the elements on. If you don't feel right about participating whether you're at home or whether you're here, just err on the side of caution and get right with God first.

But again, the opposite of that is the other mistake is saying that unless you're spotless, you're unworthy to receive communion, and that, too, is a big mistake. Being a child of the King doesn't mean you don't sin, it doesn't mean that you don't fail, it means that you recognize that the salvation you've been given is a gift that no one is ever capable of earning. And so I repeat this quote from Dane Ortlund each month: "In the kingdom of God the one thing that qualifies you is knowing you don't qualify, and the one thing that disqualifies you, is thinking that you do." It also means that when we do fail we are aware that we've sinned. The reason why is because we have God's Holy Spirit inside us convicting us, and so we grieve as children who know that we have a Father who

longs to forgive and cleanse us, who says: *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* So being a child of the King doesn't mean that we are without sin; it means that we understand that when we do sin we have an advocate with the Father, someone who speaks on our behalf, who says: *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father -- Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.*

That's it right there in a nutshell. See, we have Jesus' righteousness and not our own and therefore we are free to eat from his table. And so if you love your Lord, don't deny yourself the privilege that Jesus purchased for you. As we've said, he lived the life we were supposed to live and then died the death we deserved to die in our place so that we could be made worthy of heaven. And so as we're about to participate in the bread, I would just ask you to ask God through his Holy Spirit is this morning to point out those areas in our lives where we still need to die to self. Just take a moment to think on that and you can unpeel your bread.

1 Corinthians 11:23 says: For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and

said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." So take and eat.

Mark 8:34 again says: And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

Step one is denying ourselves; step two is taking up your cross, and just what does Jesus mean by that? You know, we've had two thousand years of stylizing the whole idea of the cross. And taking up our cross can mean something as simple as dealing with poverty or sickness or difficult circumstances. I mean people understand having a cross to bear is having some type of unique difficulty that they have to work through. But Jesus, and most certainly the disciples understood taking up your cross in a very straightforward, very literally way, it meant one thing and one thing only, it meant dying. And not just meeting death, it meant dying in the worst possible way.

Jesus had just announced to his disciples some of the details of his particular cross, and he told them that they too would each have their own. Peter couldn't believe that someone as high and lifted up as Jesus the Christ according to Peter's own words would ever consent to something as lowly, as degraded, as awful as a

cross. And for three years now Jesus has been teaching the disciples what self-denial is all about, and they came to him just as we might, so full of self and filled with the desire to listen to that little voice inside that after three years of intense training by God himself, the disciples still had an extraordinarily long way to go. I mean remember at the end of three years where we're talking about right now, Jesus is approaching the cross, the disciples in this same time frame, they get in not one but two different fights over who's going to be the biggest big shot of all when Christ comes into his reign in the new kingdom. You know, self-denial was not way up on their list of accomplishments, and we can take solace in that because self-denial without the power of the Holy Spirit is virtual impossible. I mean these very same disciples who are arguing over who would be the greatest before Jesus died and rose were the very same ones pouring their lives out selflessly after Christ had ascended and the Holy Spirit had descended. That's the very same Holy Spirit that we have. And understand, it took Jesus three years of preparation before he felt the disciples were ready to even hear about the cross and even then Peter couldn't hear it. What Jesus said to the disciples he is saying to us as well: each and every one of us will have our own unique and particular cross. That area of shame and doubt and pain and fear that we get to give over to him who judges justly. And the bottom line in all of this is whether or not we are willing to

trust in God and his plan for us when his primary evidence for earning that trust is that same cross. And it was at the cross where God laid down his perfect life, an exchange for our life of sin. Where Jesus allowed us to be able to stand before God with his righteousness on our account so that we could be worthy of heaven. In order to do that, *he who knew no sin became sin for us*. We can't even begin to comprehend that. And no matter how awful our cross may be, Jesus can still point to his and ours is going to pale by comparison.

Hebrews 4:15 says: *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.* That scripture is huge. What that scripture is trying to tell us is that Jesus can fully identify with the worst suffering this world has ever produced. In fact, if Jesus hasn't suffered more than any human who has ever lived has suffered, well then that human who suffered more has every right to say to Jesus, you have no idea what I went through. There's no one who can say that to Jesus.

I mean take for instance this idea about the shame of nakedness. I mean this is something that we seldom address, but nakedness was a huge part of the shame of the cross that Jesus took up for us. I mean I heard someone just this week say that Jesus also identifies

with sexual assault victims because he too was the victim of a sexual assault. You may not think of it that way, I hadn't thought of it that way but I've often said it's likely that Jesus was crucified naked. Well, for one we know that the soldiers stripped him of all of his clothing because they wanted his tunic, they wanted his undergarment, that's what a tunic is. *John 19* says: *When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, "They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots." So the soldiers did these things.*

Bakers New Testament Commentary says this about that.

"The clear implication of the passage which we are studying must not escape us. It is this: Jesus bore for us the curse of nakedness in order to deliver us from it! What the soldiers did when they disrobed Jesus and then divided his garments among themselves, casting lots, should cause us to pause with horror. Such a pause is suggested by the words: These things, indeed, the soldiers did. They did that which was shameful. Yet, by means of that shameful deed God's eternal plan (hence, also prophecy) was fulfilled. Hence, we pause in abhorrence and adoration!"

We also know that before Jesus was crucified he was scourged and the scourging took place before a whole battalion of Roman soldiers. A battalion is five hundred. Jesus wasn't taken off to some place with just a couple of nasty soldiers, he was arrayed before hundreds of soldiers. And the scripture is clear that before they scourged him they stripped him. *Matthew 27: Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him.*

You know what we call that today? We call that sexual assault. I mean I literally, I cannot fathom the love that God would be willing to pour out to descend to that depth for us. I mean to those who've experienced the terror and the horror of sexual assault, know that Jesus has gone there as well. Christ willingly went to his cross. But also understand this, he asks his followers to take up their own cross as well. Jesus was very clear about saying each of us is to take up his own cross, and the context that he's speaking it is clearly one of dying first to self, as he said, but secondly it means dying to whatever life you think comes ahead of the cross. We so desperately want it all to be in this world but not of it, to be for the cross but not limited to it in the eyes of the world, and Jesus very clearly says, no thank you. *And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If*

anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it."

So here's Jesus announcing a trifecta. He says let him deny himself, that's number one; let him take up his cross, that's number two; and number three, let him follow me. But Jesus, it sounds like you're making the cross a matter of life and death. I mean, I get it, the cross is important, I mean, we spend two whole hours a week just letting you know how important it is here on a Sunday morning. But don't tell me, Jesus, that following means you expect a lot more than just that. I mean it's almost as if you're saying my holding back, my saving up, my keeping my life for myself, just giving a tiny portion to you is a sure way for me to lose my life. But being extravagant and risk taking and self-denying to the point where losing my life for your sake and the gospel's will save it, is that what you're trying to say, Jesus? I'm afraid that's precisely what Jesus is saying.

And what's so hard about what Jesus is saying here is that in this country, in this culture, saving my life or losing it is never a binary choice. In North Korea, in China, in parts of Africa, the choice is clear, it's obvious. There losing my life for the sake

of the gospel absolutely saves eternally but what if losing my life doesn't come down to a binary decision but instead to a host of tiny little seemingly insignificant decisions? Do I deny my Lord and face the firing squad versus do I go along when the culture asks me to make concessions that seems small enough when in reality they all add up to a matter of life and death. I mean my kids' sports team is now having all of his games on Sunday, so I guess we don't go to church. My child just told me she's pregnant, so I guess I have to call Planned Parenthood. My son struggles with same-sex attraction, so I guess I'm going to have to find a rainbow church. You see in hostile countries, you make your choice and you pay a price. In post Christian countries, you try to make your choice in the face of a death of a thousand cuts. No individual cut feels fatal, it's just a cumulative effect, you know, a nick here, a nick there, a concession here, a concession there and before you know it you wind up saving your life only to lose it. As Jesus puts it: *For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul?*

See, Jesus is God in the flesh, I mean he's eternal God, he has no beginning, he has no end. He sits astride eternity and this planet with the benefit of a vision that encompasses all of it. He's the one who is incredulous at the bargains that we make. And why in

the world would you ever want to gain even the whole world at the cost of your soul? And we're not even talking about gaining the whole world here, we're talking about carving little tiny pieces of the American dream at the cost of what? I mean Jesus has the benefit of timelessness. He's lived in eternity past, he's walked through the present and he already knows the future and he's looking over our 80-year life spans and he's wondering what could possibly possess someone to trade an eternity for that? For what can a man give in return for his soul?

I think of someone like John Chau. John Chau is a man I've spoken of a number of times before. This is the man who attempted to bring the gospel to the Sentinelese Indians, and for his efforts they murdered him. This case brought up all kinds of responses, much of it outraged that he would attempt, first of all, to bring his culture to an indigenous tribe. There was also a lot of anger from the Christian community thinking this is extreme, this is unwarranted. I guess you could say how you react to John Chau's decision is a good indicator of how you understand what Jesus is saying here. I mean John Chau gave up his life at the age of 26 for what many consider to be a hopeless cause. They think he was a fool. He was a fool who lost his life on a fool's errand. I think he was absolutely brilliant. I think he understood with crystal clarity what Jesus meant when he said that we are to deny

ourselves, take up our cross and follow him.

He mirrored another young man named Jim Elliot who lost his life to the Auca Indians in Ecuador in a similar way some sixty, seventy years earlier. And it was Elliot who said, "He is no fool who gives up that which he cannot keep to gain that which he can never lose." Elliot died at age 28. You know, had he lived, he would have been 95 today. Had he found his life, so to speak, the life that we so thoroughly cling to, it would have been pretty much over or pretty much hardly worth living at age 95. And you think about that price that he was willing to pay sixty-seven years ago, and back then it seemed like it was so costly a price, but all it took was the passage of time to make it seem that that price was well worth paying. Those years are gone, but the sacrifice remains.

You know, all of us face that same kind of a decision, maybe not put in so obvious terms like John Chau and Jim Elliot experienced but all of us at some point are going to have to navigate through a culture that probably won't present a binary life or death choice but instead will find a thousand different ways to challenge or deny Christ's claim, *"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."* It's the most important challenge you will ever face, and how we respond to it will literally determine our eternity. It reminds me of yet

another statement or cliché that is absolutely apt and true that I'll finish on. You've heard it before. Only one life, so soon it will pass, only what's done for Christ will last. Just think about this statement: *"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me"* as we approach taking the cup.

1 Corinthians 11:25 says: *In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."* So take, and drink.

This is the part that we call heart, hands and feet, it's kind of trying to find a practical application for what we're just kind of talking about, theory meets practice, so to speak. And what I want to do is just look at these three different parts of what Jesus is saying. The first thing he's saying is deny yourself. What I would ask us to do -- I'm going to pray afterwards, what I would ask us to do is you may not have ever even thought of that voice as something separate from you. It may be just so much a part of you that you never really separated it out, but the next time somebody treats you like a servant, the next time somebody gives you something that makes you think inside who does he think he is? I deserve more, I deserve better, I deserve, I, I, I, whenever you

start having that voice inside you, try to separate it, try to step back and say, oh, what is that saying? And ask God for the wisdom to be able to even see that voice.

And then the second part is take up your cross. You know, it's not going to be -- in this country, it's just not going to be life or death in all likelihood, it may come down to that but that's very, very doubtful. It's going to be a death of a thousand cuts. It's going to be lots of little tiny compromises. And so what we need desperately in those circumstances is the wisdom to discern which sacrifices you're going to make and which ones you're not.

And finally "follow me." That's really a matter of asking what matters most in my life. What counts the most? So on those three things, let's pray.

Father, I pray for each of us here in church and whether you're listening on You Tube, I pray, Lord, for the discernment ability to hear that voice as separate from who I am. Lord, when that voice starts defending me and starts telling me how much I deserve, I deserve, I deserve, I pray that you would say whoa, Lord, what are you trying to tell me there, and give me the ability to be able to discern and deny it. And secondly, Lord, I pray for the discernment that enables us to decide what those things in this

post-Christian culture are worthy of saying no here and no more. And then finally, Lord, I just pray you'd give us the ability to understand what matters most, and what matters most is you. I pray for that grace, I pray for that wisdom, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.