

I have had the opportunity to go the renaissance fair a few different times. If you haven't been it is a fun and immersive invitation to step back in time...

At the fair you will find people dressed in costumes, authentic food vendors, shows, and even medieval fights...

And one of the many neat things about the renaissance fair, is that anyone can dress the part...

And so a few years ago, I thought it would be fun to go dressed as a moss fairy...

I spent a long time crafting my outfit, and made a giant pair of moss fairy wings... I created a frame out of wire, covered it with tape, and then used a hot glue gun to attach the moss to the frame...

They were beautiful... But boy, where they were a mess.

The moss, did not want to stay in place, due to its delicate nature, and so pieces of moss trailed along wherever the wings went...

And because I made them so big, they not only held a ton of moss - well at least at the start, but they were quite awkward to wear, as I carried them on my back...

Needless to say, the next time I went to the renaissance fair, my wings stayed at home...

And isn't that how it is when we physically carry something... No matter how light it is, eventually you start to feel it...

And our Gospel today sheds light on this idea and the act of carrying something.

As we heard Jesus say, we are to pick up our crosses and follow him.

Which probably sounds a lot different to us today, than it did to the disciples then...

Today when most people see or think of a cross, it reminds them of God and God's great love for us...

Whereas the cross in Jesus time was nothing like that... The cross during Jesus time was a sign of torture and death... Specifically at the hands of the Roman Empire.

Which means that today's equivalent of carrying a cross would be like picking up an electric chair, and caring it every day... Having it press down on you as a constant reminder of a horrific and impending death.

But perhaps that is taking the Gospel too literally... Perhaps picking up one's cross is not meant to be viewed in light of hardships and death.

Perhaps it is meant to be a reminder of how we are called to live...

After all the next thing Jesus says, after telling us to pick up our cross, is to follow him...

And yet to follow him, means to follow him to the cross and all the horror that entails.

Horror that Peter and the rest of the disciples just learned about in today's Gospel.

As this passage is the first of 3 passion predictions in Mark...

Before today, the disciples thought Jesus would become an earthly king, and overthrow the Roman Empire.

Naturally this was a bold and dangerous claim, especially since they were having this conversation in Caesarea Philippi, the heart of the Roman Empire where other gods were worshiped and where the Roman Empire reigned.

And for Peter to state aloud that Jesus was the Messiah was very risky... As Messiah, means the anointed one...

And anointing only happened to kings, as they would be anointed during the ritual of becoming king...

So while Peter is correct, that Jesus is the Messiah, he only partially understands the gravity of this claim...

Which is why Peter becomes upset when Jesus explains that the Messiah must undergo suffering, rejection and death...

Jesus' own disciples couldn't understand what it meant for Jesus to be the Messiah... And if they couldn't understand just imagine what the Roman authorities would do if they found out... They would kill Jesus right then and there.

Which is exactly what happens... At the end of Mark's Gospel, Jesus is crucified with the charge: King of the Jews...

But before this happens, Jesus has things to do... So he orders his disciples not to tell anyone he is the Messiah...

Because Jesus needs what little time he has left to live, to be God's divine love lived out in the world.

Again, it comes down to life... Not death... as the focus of Jesus' mission...

It is not so much; I will die for this... Rather, I will live for this...

So what is it that Jesus is living for?

And the answer to that question, can be found in Jesus question... Who do you say that I am?

As your answer reveals a lot about you and who you understand God to be.

Moreover, who we say Jesus is impacts how we understand life and how we live...

It influences how committed we are to follow Christ...

Because it is in that commitment, that we carry our cross.

Sometimes this might show up in how we carry ourselves, or how we help carry others...

Sometimes it might be uncomfortable, especially when life feels heavy, or even unbearable.

Because faith isn't always easy... There are hard questions to wrestle with, and there are always more unanswered questions than there are answers.

Which if you think about it, is similar to the cross...

Because the cross is a symbol for so many things... It can be a symbol of death, of life, even everlasting life, of love, and even of mystery.

Because something happened on the cross the day Jesus was crucified... Something that changed everything.

Which means that the cross invites us into curiosity and wonder, it deepens our relationships, and it brings us closer to God.

The cross becomes a part of us, we carry it sometimes without even realizing it, it is a part of the mystery that leads into each and every day.

Which means that sometimes, carrying our cross will show up like my fairy wings did... Like the moss that fell off the wings without any effort from me... Christ's love will rub off of you in the world...

Most likely when you least expect it...

Because it is not what you can do with the cross you carry, but rather what God can do through you in Christ.

The cross can give you strength when you need it the most, opening you up to share the love of Christ with the world...

Even when we live in a world, that more often than not feels like it has been turned upside down.

A world torn apart with wars, economic insecurity, a turbulent presidential election, and so much more.

Which is why the cross has so much strength... As Christ took the original symbol of the cross—something so horrific—and turned it upside down...

Through the sacred mystery of Christ, the cross is now a symbol of hope...

And a reminder of God's love... The kind of love that remains even when everything else is gone...

Love that endures deep and unending... Love that we are meant to feel every day, just like anything we carry, we are meant to feel the weight of the cross in God's love...

Weight that we are called to carry in our cross and in our love toward others, as we share Christ's love with the world... Amen.