

# THE GOSPEL OF MARK: WEEK 8

Judea & Samaria: "Jesus Foretells His Death I, II & III"

Mark 8:31-10:52

**Commentary: "διακλωνικός – diaklonikós: diaconal.**

Our reading this week spends a lot of time dealing with the issue of what it means to be a disciple – a follower; a servant. And this is a good thing! It's clear that we didn't get it when Jesus was teaching our forefathers – even though they were His 'disciples' and 'followers' – and, that we still don't get it today.

Being a 'Christ follower' – a Christian – is, according to the standards of this world, a fool's errand: why would one want to follow someone who was born as a 'nobody', spent time with the lost, orphaned, widowed; the diseased, foreign, outcast; the poor, tax-collectors, even Romans – all people 'good' people didn't associate with, was arrested and executed on a cross: who would follow a dead 'leader'? Especially a leader who also preached about "denying"/'dying to oneself,' "losing oneself," sacrificial service, and "take up their cross and follow" Him. Why would anyone in the world – this world – want to do this?

This world tells us that if we're not #1 then we're last, a loser, less-than everybody else – that we're just a faceless member of the crowd: this world only pays attention to the top dog, the one out front, the leader of the pack. Leaders are the stars. Leaders make decisions; followers follow them. Leaders don't show weakness, emotion, or fear – and they certainly don't talk about their own death. Anyone who wants to get anywhere in this world needs to think about #1 – and not anyone else, let alone become their 'servant'.

But, yet, this is what Jesus calls us to do. And, what's more; He tells us that if we "want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for [His] sake." (Mark 8:35)

In Mark 10:43-44, the word Jesus uses is "*Diakonie*" – a Greek word used to refer to helping – or serving – people in need: it also means to 'serve tables' like a waiter or waitress; like a servant, or slave. "*Diakonie*" is a constant reminder of the selfless love taught by Jesus in such gospel passages as Luke 10:25–37 – the story of the Good Samaritan. Early disciples were particularly responsive to the fact that the Jesus – the Son of God – had lived, taught, and died in lowly circumstances – as a servant of God whose life was spent in service of those He came to save. They thought that if the Master had chosen to be seen as a servant, they as individuals, as leaders, and even as congregations - the Body of Christ – had to follow His example by showing their love for God by serving and loving others – their neighbours as themselves. And, by doing this, they sought to guide – to lead – their neighbours to Jesus, God, and their salvation.

In many ways, 'following' and 'leading' are the two poles of our faith: we are to serve the One who is our Lord and King, while leading others to Him – and to the salvation He offers – in and through who we live out our faith; by our actions and example. The challenge is not to forget that it is in our service that we lead: that our calling is to faithfully submit ourselves, keep our eyes fixed on Christ, and stay the course by following His Word, example, and plan for us.

An image of children holding a guide line has often been used... children linked together in a security line tied to their teacher, but a better metaphor would be that of the mountaineering act of climbing (called a "Prusik") in which

one uses an pre-set/fixed, anchor line that provides both a 'guided' route and security from falling. The lead climber free climbs – without a rope – risking their life to lead the way, set anchors, run the guide rope, all so those who follow will be safe – and reach the summit.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada, since its inception, has had a 'Diaconal Ministry' that recognizes and honours the historical tradition of the 'priesthood of all believers', in which all followers of Jesus "are called to be servants of Jesus Christ." May we all live up to this calling.

**"διακλωνικός" – Diaklonikós/Diaconia: Diaconal.**

'*Diakonia*' is a term derived from Greek, used in the New Testament, with different meanings. Sometimes, refers to the specific kind to help any people in need. At other times, it means to serve the tables, a Christian theological term from Greek that encompasses the call to serve the poor and oppressed. The terms "*deaconess*" and "*diaconate*" also come from the same root, which refers to the emphasis on service within those vocations. In scripture deacons were those whom the Church appointed to dispense alms, and take care of the poor

(Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diaconia> )