

“The Soul in Everyday Stuff: The Cross”
Mark 8:34-35

Last Sunday, the Men’s Hockey gold medal game between Canada and the USA at the 2026 Winter Olympics was a thriller that will be talked about for decades. It was an incredible display of grit, but the image that will remain etched in our minds is that of American star Jack Hughes. In the third period, Hughes took a high stick to the mouth that knocked out his front teeth. Bleeding and in obvious pain, he refused to leave the ice. He didn’t retreat to the locker room to protect himself; he stayed in the battle. Just 1 minute and 41 seconds into overtime, it was Hughes who fired home the "golden goal," ending a 46-year gold medal drought for the U.S. men’s team. His toothless, bloodied grin as he hoisted the gold medal became an instant icon of sacrifice:

https://youtu.be/QP_biEWUeVQ.

Hughes’ high level of commitment to his team reminds me of God’s radical commitment to us. As we ponder the symbol of the cross this week, I invite you to consider how scandalous it was for the early followers of Jesus to proclaim a Roman instrument of execution as a sign of "success."

Richard Rohr writes that Christianity’s vision of God was a radical departure from ancient religions. Instead of a God who demands we sacrifice our lives or crops to appease God, Christianity claims that God’s very body was given for *us* to eat. This upends the "quid pro quo" logic of the world. As long as we believe in a God of retributive justice - a God who requires punishment to be satisfied - we stay trapped in what Rohr calls the "myth of redemptive violence."

But the cross tells a different story. It tells us that God did not shy away from the depths of human struggle. The cross is central to our faith because it reminds us that there is no human experience - no defeat, no pain, no loss - where God is not present and willing to suffer for the sake of love.

We often want faith to be a shield that protects us from vulnerability. But the cross calls us to embrace it. In Mark 8, we find Jesus at a turning point. He is at Caesarea Philippi, a city built to honor the "divinity" of Caesar and the power of the Roman Empire - a system that believed peace only came through violence and oppression.

In the shadow of that worldly power, Jesus asks, "Who do you say that I am?" When Peter calls him the Messiah, Jesus immediately begins to speak of suffering. Peter rebukes him because he wanted a military hero, a winner who would get the job done. But Jesus reminds us that the true essence of the human experience is not retribution, but connection, unity, and love.

Let’s listen to Mark 8:34-35

He called the crowd with his disciples and said to them, "If any wish to come after me, 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.

This "downward mobility," as Henri Nouwen called it, goes against every instinct we have. Everything in our culture tells us to move upward - to be more right, more powerful, more in control. Yet, following Jesus to the cross means letting go of the ego's power so that we can find our true soul-power.

The cross was the "electric chair" of the Roman day, designed to terrorize. Jesus took that symbol of ultimate loss and used it to invite us into a new logic where "losing" your life is the only way to truly save it. This isn't about being a doormat for injustice; it is about finding a resilience that the world cannot take away.

A Practical Challenge for the Week: "The Downward Step"

This week, identify one situation where you feel the urge to "win" - to win an argument, to assert your authority, or to hide a mistake. Instead of moving "up," take a step "down." Apologize first. Listen to someone you usually dismiss. Perform a secret act of service. See if losing a bit of your "ego-power" allows the peace of God to rise up in its place.

We will end with the words of Mahatma Gandhi, "When I despair, I remember that all through history the ways of truth and love have always won. There have been tyrants and murderers, and for a time, they can seem invincible, but in the end, they always fall. Think of it - always."