



TAKE UP YOUR CROSS

By Ian Menzies

'Take up your cross and follow me,' is a well-known exhortation from Jesus in Matthew 16: 24. But it has always slightly puzzled me. What does it mean to be challenged time and again to 'take up your cross' when so many of us may have been trying to do just that, in many cases for a lifetime? Reading on in the passage, how, exactly, do we 'set our mind on divine things' and not 'on human things'?

Well, perhaps we should thank Charles William Everest, the hymnist, for some ideas. He wrote an equally well-known hymn that commences with those words. His hymn extols us to have a willing heart; to be humble; to be unafraid; to put aside pride; to be calm; and to rely on Christ's strength. Those are fine sentiments indeed, but it occurs to me that the injunction to

'take up your cross' first implies that you actually know what your cross is. That you can recognise it, lurking in your background somewhere.

Now I don't think anyone back then or today would think that Jesus was referring to a physical cross to be heaved up and carted around until you eventually are hoisted to die upon it. And if not, just what is this cross we have to take up? To accept and move on regardless? To identify it requires some deep self-reflection. But the passage contains a warning as well: to paraphrase liberally, 'Just get on with it!' says Jesus. In other words, we have to try and identify what is holding us back now, what our cross is now, to name it, to take it up and to move on, following him. To try to cling to things as they are is futile, they will surely be lost to us.

Reflection:

Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.'

Matthew 16: 24-25