Mark’s gospel today has Jesus in the villages of Caesarea Philippi. He asks his disciples, perhaps just out of sheer curiosity, who people understand him to be. He knows people are trying to sort him out.

Some have apparently guessed him to be John the Baptist, mathematically impossible, but maybe in the sense that he bore the mantle of John the Baptist and commanded a similar type of divine authority.

Perhaps he was Elijah, the illusive prophet who never tasted death. Maybe this would be the time when Elijah would return, reconcile the brokenhearted and take his rightful place at the Passover Meal.

Others thought that perhaps God was sending another prophet to help save the children of Israel from Rome’s oppressive rule.

Whoever Jesus was, he continued to draw crowds of people – sometimes in the thousands. He was being noticed. In fact, he could hardly find a quiet place to catch his breath before word as to his whereabouts got out and soon the lame and halt were at his feet.

Jesus then turns to the twelve and asks them, “Who do you say that I am?” I’m sure they all looked at each other not knowing what to say. Finally Peter speaks up and says, “You are the Messiah.”

It’s likely that Peter’s sense of Jesus’ role in what must be “God’s plan to restore Israel” and Jesus’ call “to reconcile the human race” bore no resemblance to each other.

Even after the resurrection and moments before the ascension, the disciples were to again question Jesus to see if they were to witness his reestablishment of the kingdom of Israel.
Mark’s Jesus goes on to tell the disciples what his Messiahship looks like. It will mean being arrested, put on trial, and sentenced to death as a criminal to then rise triumphant in three days.

Jesus wants them to understand so that when the time comes they will remember these words and not lose heart.

Peter challenges Jesus’ end-game and is summarily put in his place. “Peter, you have no idea how God works.”

Jesus invited the crowd then, and us now, to join the twelve and teaches them about discipleship.

Mark’s Jesus says, “Take up your cross and go imitate what you see. Go and free your neighbor from demons when no one else will help. Seek out the leper and gently lay your hands on those whom no one else will touch. Grab some friends, tear open your neighbor’s roof, so the paralyzed can dance.”

Take up your cross and go be the “good news” in language a child can understand. Climb in the boat of one distressed and speak words of peace until the waves against them give up and take their rest. Take up your cross means to look into the eyes of one in torment long enough for them to recollect who they were meant to be. Go, find someone caught in chains of their own making and bring them a fresh change of clothes. Taking up your cross means leaving the bedside of your deepest fear long enough to find the One who heals. We’re to take our twelve years of shame out into the daylight that we might have a brush with grace. Taking up your cross means to pack 5 loaves and 2 fish and head for an open grassy place. Throw a picnic and see if all we meet aren’t fed. Then we’re apparently supposed to count the leftovers for the sheer joy of it! Taking up your cross means that if you lose your life for the sake of another, you will find it.

This is hard work. I understand better why Jesus asked these questions in community. He knew Peter would not be his own best teacher.
I can’t live into the life Jesus imagines for me by myself.

I need to be part of a community of faith that expects something different from me – something that teaches me to “Love the Lord my God with all my heart and with all my soul and with all my mind and with all my strength – and to love my neighbor as myself.”

Simply put, in the stories of Jesus we hear an invitation to live beyond our perceived capacity.

I need to be around people whose expectations of me are greater than the life I have settled upon. The best teachers I ever had in school were the ones who refused to let me quit simply by turning the assignment in.

I need Trinity Cathedral to be a place where I am living on the edge of growth. I need to be surrounded by people who expect more of my life than being kind to those I like and generous with what I can afford.

I need food for this journey. This meal we are about to share together will linger long after you have gone home. I will leave today hearing the hymns and seeing your faces.

And when confronted with another opportunity to lose some of my self for the sake of another I will begin again the battle to choose the good.

The sun will go down and come up and I will start tomorrow better equipped because of this day we have shared together.

Christianity is messy. It’s pesky and is an irritant just below the skin. It reorders your priorities and seeks to challenge everything you’ve ever thought or done.

It’s gutsy work. It’s acknowledging fault when others thought they were to blame. It empties you when you thought you had nothing left to give.
It calls you to forgive as you have been forgiven. It seeks peace even when you know you’re right. It beckons you to be a quiet place in a world so harsh with words…to be still and know that God is God for the sake of another.

Want to know something really odd? Somewhere, we’ve all said “yes” to this “discipleship thing” or we probably wouldn’t be sitting here!

To that I have just one thing to say:

O God make speed to save us,
O Lord make haste to help us!
Amen.